

WHY IS THIS HOUR DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER HOURS?

THE MISSION OF WORSHIP

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

NICOLE ELIZABETH HOWARD LOCK

MAY 2017



## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
Chapter	
1. WORSHIP: A STORY OF LOST AND FOUND	1
Introduction	1
A Brief History of Our Story	2
Rediscovering Our Story	15
2. GOD’S STORY: WORSHIP, MISSION, OR . . . ?	19
Beyond Matthew 28:18-20	19
Recalling the Call to Retell the Story: Deuteronomy 6	24
A New Covenant, the Same Call: Matthew 22	28
The Old and New Covenant: Call to Missional Praise	31
The Church’s Call to Missional Praise	33
A Co-Mission Beyond, But Not Excluding, the Great Commission	38
3. WORSHIP: WHEN GOD’S STORY AND THE HUMAN STORY MEET	44
How Humanity Works . . . and How the World Works	45
From <u>story</u> to <u>Story</u>	51
Working It Out: The Work of Worship	56
Toward More Imaginative Worship	77
4. PROJECT: “WORTH-SHIP: ALL WE’RE WORTH FOR ALL GOD’S WORTH”	78
Congregational Context	78

Worship Series Project	82
Worship Reflection	102
5. SO . . . WHAT IS SO DIFFERENT?	104
It <i>Can</i> Be Different . . . When We Are Out of Our Minds	105
It <i>Can</i> Be Different . . . Because of the Different Participants	110
It <i>Can</i> Be Different . . . When It Is the Same	116
It <i>Can</i> Be Different . . . Because It Is <i>Never</i> the Same	120
Conclusion: It <i>Is</i> Different . . . Because of The Savior	126
Appendix	
A. OVERVIEW OF WORSHIP SERIES	127
B. ORDERS OF WORSHIP	128
C. SERMON OUTLINES, HYMN INTRODUCTIONS, CHARGES, AND BENEDICTIONS	145
D. WORSHIP REFLECTION SURVEYS	183
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186
VITA	191

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis-project is designed to assist worshippers, especially their leaders, in thoughtful, theological reflection about the liturgical life of the congregation. It surveys the biblical understanding of the worship of God and God's mission in the world, incorporating current liturgical literature relating God's Story and the human story. It offers a sample worship series to explore and test these insights. Finally, it offers some conclusions and further questions to consider as leaders seek to be faithful in their liturgical ministry.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WORSHIP: A STORY OF LOST AND FOUND

#### Introduction

It is right, therefore, that from time to time the church should take stock of that which is most central, most important, most vital in our common life together. Though we sing with the tongues of men and of angels, if we are not truly worshipping the living God, we are noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Though we organize the liturgy most beautifully, if it does not enable us to worship the living God, we are mere ballet-dancers. Though we repave the floor and reface the stonework, though we balance budgets and attract all the tourists, if we are not worshipping God, we are nothing.

— N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*

On the night of the Passover Seder, a profound question is included as part of the Haggadah. In the spirit of Deuteronomy 6 the youngest able person present is required to ask, “Why is this night different from all other nights?”<sup>1</sup> The answer is simple, yet profound: The first night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is different because that night recites the Story of when God delivered the spiritual ancestors out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:17) into freedom to worship (Exodus 7:16). That event is celebrated each year in accordance with Scripture’s command to retell the Story to the next generation (Exodus 13:8).

Followers of Jesus are also called to celebrate and retell God’s Story – our story of freedom in Jesus Christ. This act of retelling is our true worship. Therefore, the same

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer, ed., *New American Haggadah* (New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2012), 21.

question could be asked of corporate Christian worship on the Lord's Day: "Why is this hour different from all other hours?"

Is our worship hour different? Many worshipers – lay people and clergy, worshipers and worship leaders alike – might find it difficult to articulate the difference, let alone the reason why there could or should be a difference between what *does* take place in the "normal" liturgical life of any mainline congregation and what that same hour *might* be. Often, for many people, it seems the worship hour is entirely too similar to any other hour of any given day. What is the Story that makes worship different? Why is it not being told, and how has so much of the contemporary church arrived at this place? How might God's Story be told and *retold* to the end that, not only is the worship hour *itself* different from all other hours, but the worship hour also *makes* a difference in all other hours? These are the questions that form the basis of this thesis-project.

### **A Brief History of Our Story**

One point of entry into this larger conversation is to ask, what is worship, and how does it relate to God's plan for the renewal of a congregation? As I start to reflect on these two questions from my perspective as a pastor, I realize that perhaps such reflection should really commence from the perspective of a worshiper. How would those in my congregation answer? My experience is that they might be quick to answer the first question – what is worship? – although their definition might differ from the biblical definition. They might be less able to relate an understanding of worship in

reference to God's plan to bring renewal to their congregation – much less to God's world.

### How Did We Get Here?

Present-day worshipers are not alone. In his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The church is the church only when it exists for others."<sup>2</sup> As much as the setting of these words, written from a 1944 Nazi prison cell, might seem sufficiently poignant, the timing of Bonhoeffer's writing is also important. Within the next decade, the postwar church in North America appeared to find a new reason for existence: institutional maintenance.

Before turning to that decade, it is important to trace the seeds of this shift in rationale through preceding centuries. This change began gradually. In the first centuries of the church, there was a need for some institutional maintenance in order for the church to establish its identity and care for new converts as the gospel reached into the culture. There was also a need for the church to protect itself from persecution and to differentiate itself from the culture. As South African missiologist David J. Bosch notes, "For centuries a static conception of the church prevailed; the world outside the church was perceived as a hostile power. . . . Put differently, the church was a world on its own. . . . Mission was a process of reproducing churches, and once these had been reproduced, all energy was spent on maintenance."<sup>3</sup> When the church saw the world as

---

<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), 382.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 376.



hostile – and the world saw the church as hostile – some degree of maintenance seemed necessary in order for the church to continue the mission to which Christ had called it.

If a maintenance mindset was necessary – perhaps even *understandable* – when the world was hostile to the church, then what happened when the world became less hostile? One might expect the church to be more of Bonhoeffer’s “church for others.” Church history reveals the opposite trend, however. When Emperor Constantine converted, legalized Christianity with the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313),<sup>4</sup> and later made it the official religion of the state, the church and the world entered the era known as Christendom. Persecution was no longer as significant of a threat in the Western World. The percentage of Christians increased in the Greco-Roman world from 5.4 percent in 280 A.D. to 16.2 percent in 313 A.D.<sup>5</sup> With decreased opposition and increased toleration, the way was clear for congregations to reach out beyond their walls and engage the culture with the gospel. At the same time, the incentive for institutional growth was also removed. When Christianity became the “religion” of the culture, it became easier for some Christians to stay within their walls.

Jumping ahead to the mid-twentieth century, the culture of Euro-American Christendom reached its zenith in the 1950’s, a mere decade after Bonhoeffer’s writing.

---

<sup>4</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins, 1997), 11. Of note, Stark calls it the “edict of toleration.”

<sup>5</sup> Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 11.

“In 1952, 75 percent of Americans said that religion was ‘very important to them personally.’”<sup>6</sup> As pastor and author Timothy Keller surmises,

The traditional, highly church-centered approach worked well when there was one dominant church and religious tradition in a culture and when the private and public sectors put far fuller weight behind the church. The institutions of society and the shared symbols and practices of common life expressed, confirmed, and reinforced religious beliefs. In such an environment, the culture’s God seemed inevitable and the worldview of our society’s religion seemed plausible to everyone.<sup>7</sup>

In this presumably “Christian” culture, there was common consensus about moral values. Church growth happened with little, if any, effort: “It was generally understood that being part of a church was a good thing. In fact, those who wanted to be respected members of their community understood that local church attendance would be part of the package.”<sup>8</sup> The question was not, “Do you go to church?” The question was, “Where do you go to church?” Thus, the worship hour of any given congregation was characterized by the flavor of that tradition and the resources available to a given congregation, not by its uniqueness within the culture. As a result, “that hour” was different from “any other hour” in demonstrably few ways.

With church growth happening so easily, “evangelism” became an odd concern relegated to those congregations that were formed and influenced most by the frontier revivalism of the previous century. The result was that, by the early part of the twenty-first century, authors such as Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim could say that the

---

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 182.

<sup>7</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 183.

“Christendom Church has been run on a largely shepherd-teacher model, and because it has had a privileged position in society, it has been inclined to dispense with the more missional or evangelistic ministry types (apostle, prophet, evangelist).”<sup>9</sup> In the absence of these ministry types, many congregations<sup>10</sup> began to focus solely on “preaching, public worship, the pastorate, and charity.”<sup>11</sup>

Since cultural institutions, such as schools, sports leagues, and the entertainment industry, were doing the “heavy lifting, infusing people with a broadly Christian way of thinking about things,”<sup>12</sup> this shift from a mission center to a maintenance-oriented chaplaincy center became the goal for many mainline congregations. A review of a church calendar (or, perhaps even more so, a church budget) revealed this priority, as congregations offered an impressive array of women’s circles, knitting groups, book clubs, sports teams, and fellowship opportunities. None of these offerings were necessarily wrong in and of themselves, but who was the target audience? What purpose was being served? Where were these events focused? In considering the scope of the church’s ministries, the answer seemed to be that church members were proclaiming, “Come to us!”<sup>13</sup> as if the church were “a place where

---

<sup>9</sup> Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Not all, as I will address in the next section.

<sup>11</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 375.

<sup>12</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 259. As examples of this “broadly Christian way of thinking about things,” Keller lists “respect for the Ten Commandments, commitment to the ethical teachings of the Gospels, belief in a personal God, the afterlife, a judgment day, and moral absolutes.”

<sup>13</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 376.

certain things happen.”<sup>14</sup> The church had become a “vendor of religious services and goods.”<sup>15</sup> Rather than being Bonhoeffer’s “church for others,” the church functioned as a “church for members,” or, to borrow from the vendor language, “a church for consumers.”<sup>16</sup>

Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8),<sup>17</sup> not, “You will be my consumers.” Jesus commissioned his followers to “Go!” to all nations, not to entice people to “Come to us!”<sup>18</sup> Jesus said, “Go and make *disciples* of all nations” (Matthew 28:19, emphasis added),<sup>19</sup> not “Go and make *members*,” as so many seem to have translated our commission – in practice, if not in theory.

### Where Are We Now?

If a consumerist Christianity was the outcome when the church felt at home in its culture, then what would happen when the culture no longer felt like home? This has become our contemporary context – a shift that happened almost unperceivably at first

---

<sup>14</sup> Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 83.

<sup>15</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> Here Bosch would disagree with Bonhoeffer, saying we are not to be a church “for others,” for that phrase suggests Western Christians “know what is best” for others. Before we can begin to understand what the other needs, we have first to be with the other. Therefore, Bosch prefers to call us “the church *with* others.” Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 375.

<sup>17</sup> All Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (1989), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>18</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 376. Bosch further notes that a “church with others” is not proclaiming “Come to us!” but “Let us follow him!”

<sup>19</sup> I will expand on this biblical passage more fully in Chapter 2.

and then with alarming speed. “By the late 1960s a major cultural shift was afoot. . . . The very idea of moral authority began to be questioned.”<sup>20</sup> Many factors contributed to this shift. Enlightenment philosophies stressed the need to question authority and rely on personal reason, while romanticism stressed personal experience and feelings. Social trends exposed people to new ideas with advances in air travel, television, and the Internet. The political, social, and sexual revolutions of the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s led to the rise of postmodernism and relativism. The culture no longer viewed the church, or any institution, as the authority figure. The *individual* became the authority figure.

As a result, “Church attendance dropped from approximately 50% of the population in 1958 to about 40 percent in 1969, the largest decline ever recorded in such a short time span.”<sup>21</sup> While the seeker movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s led to some growth among conservative congregations, by the 1990’s both mainline and conservative congregations were in obvious decline. “The culture had become a problem the church could no longer ignore.”<sup>22</sup>

Still, it seems that many congregations *do* choose to ignore the culture or at least seem indifferent to it. At the same time, the culture has not been indifferent to the church. In fact, it could be argued that the culture understands human nature better than the church. In *Imagining the Kingdom*, James K.A. Smith observes,

Because of this neglect and our stunted anthropology, we have failed to recognize the degree and extent to which secular liturgies *do* implicitly capitalize on our embodied penchant for storied formation. This becomes a way to

---

<sup>20</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 181.

<sup>21</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 182.

<sup>22</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 182.

account for Christian assimilation to consumerism, nationalism, and various stripes of egoisms.<sup>23</sup>

Keller concurs: “Culture is complex, subtle, and inescapable. . . . And if we are not deliberately thinking about our culture, we will simply be conformed to it without ever knowing it is happening.”<sup>24</sup> Given culture’s subtleties, Smith would encourage this deliberate thinking about culture, not through the lens of intellectualism, but through the lens of narrative. What story does the culture tell? What story does the church tell?

Viewed through this lens, it appears the story many contemporary congregations tell is that the consumerist tendencies of the 1950’s are not to be abandoned, but *applauded*. These tendencies seem especially prevalent in the worship experience. When I consider the average church member’s understanding of worship, I recall comments I often hear after a service: “That sermon really *spoke to me*.” “I really *liked* the hymn selections and choir anthem today.” In inquiring what people desire in preaching and worship, statements range from, “We want a sermon that *makes us feel good*” to “We want a message that *will get us through to the following Sunday*” to “We want something that will make us think about Scripture and our lives and *tell us what we are to do*.” While the latter may come closer to the biblical understanding, the question beneath most of these comments is: How is this message and worship relevant to *me* and *my life*? If it is, I stay. If it is not, I just may shop around for a congregation

---

<sup>23</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 39-40.

<sup>24</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 186.

that *fits me* better. This is the language of consumerism - of cultural contract, not of covenant.

The question of relevance is most often phrased, “Is anything special going on this Sunday?” In an article in *Reformed Worship*, Paul Detterman responds,

Sunday worship competes with pan-thematic television, a leisurely brunch, or the self-imposed demands of golfers and soccer moms. These cultural ‘religions’ influence the minds and hearts of the people we face each Sunday. . . . The greatest danger . . . is the mind-drift that now equates competing events with worship. The choice is no longer between church (where I should be) and another event (where I really have to be.) For many modern people, there is little reason to be in Christian worship at all beyond its immediate value to amuse or possibly inform.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, it is fascinating to see how the secular culture “gets” the importance of the church’s “event,” if not the necessity of the gospel message. Recently, when a friend invited me to attend an event with her on a Sunday morning and I declined, she responded, “Oh, right, you have that other presentation (worship) and workshop (adult discipleship hour).” This conversation reveals much about the formative power of story. In the age of Christendom when the church was viewed as a moral authority, appealing to people’s minds about how they “should” go to church worked. However, if one gives continuing consideration to Smith’s notion of the embodied stories of the other isms<sup>26</sup> - relativism, romanticism, individualism – not just intellectualism, one discovers a need to appeal to “our passional orientation to the world”<sup>27</sup>: “[Intellectualists] believe that changing what we *think* will change what we *do*. But what if we are actors before we are thinkers?

---

<sup>25</sup> Paul Detterman, “Detterman’s Top Ten List,” *Reformed Worship* 69 (September 2003), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 31.

What if our action is driven and generated less by what we think, and more by what we love?”<sup>28</sup> In the case of the conversation with my friend, she chose to do what she loves on Sunday, and as my friend she respected that I chose to do what I love. In this sense, the hour of worship for many in our congregations – and in our communities – is not so much different as it is the same: it is one hour that is part of our weekly routine in which we pick and choose among many options based on what we love.

Smith’s theory of how our loves drive our actions is especially critical to the church’s worship: “‘We are what we love’ amounts to ‘we are what we worship’ . . . we are *liturgical* animals: in some fundamental way, we construct our world and act within it on the basis of what we worship.”<sup>29</sup> Could it be that, in order to make the worship hour different from all other hours, the church’s liturgical life needs to embrace an understanding of how worshipers are liturgical animals? Could it be that, in order for the liturgical hour to shape all other hours, the Story we tell in worship must shape our loves? Could it be that when people ask, “Is there anything special going on in worship?” that is exactly what they are asking: “Will it speak to my loves?”

In response to the question, “Is anything special going on in worship?” an evangelical worship leader might retort, “Yes, we’re worshiping Jesus!” But when we who are called to lead God’s people in worship are honest with ourselves (and our congregants), we are equally part of the problem, if not more so:

We are their worship *leaders*. How much do we care what the people in our congregations think they are doing in worship? How much do we care how they

---

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32-33.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 27.



will be worshiping one year, one decade, or one generation after we are gone?  
How are we preparing the church we lead today to be a worshiping community  
in the future?<sup>30</sup>

In order for us to nurture a community of worshipers, that is, in order for us to answer  
Jesus' call to make *disciples*, we as pastors need to consider our own understanding of  
worship and our call to lead God's people in worshiping God for all God is worth.

### How Do We Get There From Here?

When trying to shift from a consumerist approach to worship that says, "Come  
to us!" to true biblical worship that says, "Go into the world!", worship leaders and the  
people they lead do not know where to start – and often seem to start in the wrong  
place. Bemoaning the fact that, "Rather than being a force at the center of culture,  
Christianity has moved to the margins,"<sup>31</sup> the inclination is to try to reclaim the center of  
culture by "reinventing church": "adapting sophisticated marketing and product  
development techniques from the business world – so it would appeal to secular,  
unchurched people."<sup>32</sup> The problem with this approach is twofold: First, it does not  
"reinvent the church" – it simply "reinforces" the existing consumerism. Second, it begs  
the question, what happens when these techniques lose their appeal and people get  
bored?

---

<sup>30</sup> Detterman, "Detterman's Top Ten List," 3.

<sup>31</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 259.

<sup>32</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 187.

In his masterfully ironic book *Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has the senior demon Screwtape advise that his nephew Wormwood work on Christians' "horror of the Same Old Thing":

The horror of the Same Old Thing is one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heart – an endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship. The humans live in time, and experience reality successively. To experience much of it, therefore, they must experience change. And since they need and must experience change, the Enemy (being a hedonist at heart) has made change pleasurable to them, just as He has made eating pleasurable. But since He does not wish them to make change, any more than eating, an end in itself. He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence. He has contrived to gratify both tastes together in the very world He has made, by that union of change and permanence which we call Rhythm. . . . so we pick out this natural pleasantness of change and twist it into a demand for absolute novelty.<sup>33</sup>

From the seasons of the year to the seasons of the liturgical calendar, God has given God's people a Rhythm. The Sabbath itself is intended to provide a Rhythm to the seven-day week through the way God's Story is retold. But when the consumerist mentality and its propensity for boredom twists God's Story into the "same old story," many worshipers are tempted to demand novelty, and many worship leaders are tempted to provide it.

In the pursuit of novelty and the need to start somewhere, both lay people and clergy may be inclined to start with the quality of the worship hour, as Vice President for International Justice Mission Jim Martin observes in *The Just Church*. Reflecting on James 1:2, Martin considers the mundane trials of slow Internet and cell-phone bill

---

<sup>33</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 135-136.

errors that consume us, “trials that, while being real in their own way, pale in comparison to the sort of trials James referred to”:

I’ve come to realize that the only trials that tend to come my way are trials of the mundane sort . . . And because our trials aren’t producing that kind of joy [that James talks about], many of us turn inward and resort to examining the quality of our worship. Perhaps another church with another worship style will help. Perhaps more expository preaching on Sunday will change our experience of God during the week.<sup>34</sup>

In *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Alan J. Roxburgh makes a similar point. Calling these technical adaptations “window dressing,” he contends,

Up to this point the church has dealt with loss of place and identity in the community by trying out better marketing, offering a coffee bar on Sunday morning, providing a greater variety of options in terms of meeting personal taste in worship styles – introducing videos rather than sermons and candles where there had been none before – establishing strategic planning, creating a multisite ministry, and deciding all we have to do is turn our attention from the inside to the outside.<sup>35</sup>

While turning attention to the outside is critical to our becoming a “church with others,” if it is done at the expense of addressing the root problem inside, the church’s loss of identity will only increase.

I do not wish to suggest that the trials we face as a church are “mundane,” nor does Roxburgh:

The list of issues confronting us is long and raises many hard questions about what it means to be the church in this time and what place the gospel has in all this swirling change. These are the questions that can’t be put off. Yet our response to them is inadequate. Changing forms and establishing programs are not what is needed. These got us into this mess in the first place. . . .

---

<sup>34</sup> Jim Martin, *The Just Church: Becoming a Risk-Taking, Justice-Seeking, Disciple-Making Congregation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 24.

<sup>35</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

. . . At this point in our history, we need to be asking radically different questions: What is God up to in our neighborhoods and communities? How do we join with what God is doing in these places? Church questions are a subset of these far more important questions.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, I would argue that there is a church question we need first to address before we can join with what God is doing in our neighborhoods: What Story do we tell in worship?

Returning to Martin's critique of how we tend first to examine the quality of our worship, perhaps such examination is not as unworthy an enterprise as it appears. Perhaps instead of examining the quality of the cover of the storybook, we need first to examine the quality of the Story inside. When it comes to keeping our biblical mission at the center, it seems many times worship is the first place where mission gets moved to the periphery. Could it be that the reason we have lost our place in the center of our culture is because we have lost the center of our Story in worship? Instead of striving to reclaim the center of the culture, what if the church sought to reclaim the center of our Story? Could it be that, in doing so, we might find that we do indeed reclaim the center of the culture – not because we have claimed it, but because Jesus Christ *sends* us out to it?

### **Rediscovering Our Story**

As Smith observes, there is indeed power in storied formation, and the culture knows this. Schools and libraries regularly have “story time” as a means to nurture

---

<sup>36</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 21-22.

children. Families tell and re-tell stories to remind the next generation of their roots, their heroes, their values. Stories can allow the listener to escape the world in a momentary fantasy, to remind him or her of how the world is supposed to be, or both. Worship is just like that story time – only this story is not fantasy; it is as real as it gets.

To our members (and non-members alike) who want to know what we are to do with our lives, we cannot know what we are to do until we know the Story of which we are a part.<sup>37</sup> That is the Story – God’s Story - into which the worship hour invites us. To those who want something to get us through to the next Sunday, our worship hour is not a time when a deistic god tops off our fuel tanks and sends us back out saying, “Good luck to you out there”<sup>38</sup>; if it were, the hour would be anything but restful – or worshipful. Worship is the time when the God of the universe says, “I am sending you, and I will go with you.” That is both the encouragement and the challenge of the worship hour – and that is what makes it different from all other hours.

Do our worshipers understand that difference? Do we as worship leaders understand the difference?

Clergy can be equally myopic in our view of worship. Much time is invested in crafting the words of the sermon and comparably little time in planning the other words of worship – liturgy, music, and especially the sending - treating it as a bookend, rather than an open door. If worship leaders have this mentality, is it any wonder the people they lead have a consumerist view of worship? How might a worship leader lead in such

---

<sup>37</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153. I will return to Smith’s points and mine in Chapters 3 and 4.

a way that worship becomes, not “something to get us through to next Sunday,” but something to send us with a missional thrust into glorifying God in the world? How does it truly become an hour that is different from any other hour – and, at the same time, shapes all our other hours?

Certainly, preachers can cast this vision in preaching. Yet, to reclaim the biblical rhythm of worship, *all* of worship needs to be caught up in that rhythm – from the call to worship to the sending. Preachers may do well to keep the Story at the center of the sermon and the center, at least of its order, of worship, but that Story needs to permeate from the center of the Word to the beginning and (s)ending of worship, in order for it to permeate from the center of worship into the center of our culture, for, in the words of the late British missionary and pastor Lesslie Newbigin, “Where something else is put at the center, a moral code, a set of principles, or the alleged need to meet some criterion imposed from outside the story, one is adrift in the ever-changing tides of history, and the community which commits itself to these things becomes one more piece of driftwood in the current.”<sup>39</sup>

In the chapters that follow, this thesis-project will explore the biblical, academic, and practical aspects of the question, “Why Is This Hour Different from All Other Hours? The Mission of Worship.” Chapter Two begins with a consideration of the relationship between the worship of God and God’s mission in the world. What can be gleaned from the study of Scripture that illustrates the heart and trajectory of God’s great Story? Chapter Three offers a review of selections from current literature on the intersection of

---

<sup>39</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 148.

human stories with God's Story. Chapters Four and Five set forth the scope and design of a five-week worship series entitled, "Worth-Ship: All We're Worth for All God's Worth." These chapters will include responses from members of a focus group to the proclamation of the Word, as well as the call to worship and sending liturgies throughout this series. The final step involves an analysis of the information and the conclusions that may be drawn, along with suggestions for possible further study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GOD'S STORY: WORSHIP, MISSION, OR . . . ?

Chapter One posed the question of how worship leaders reclaim the center of God's Story. The answer, of course, is in God's Word, but to which texts do worship leaders turn? While certain obvious "go-to" texts convey the core missional calling of the church, other scriptural paths can be explored.

#### Beyond Matthew 28:18-20

Matthew 28:18-20 is a text commonly cited as the biblical basis for the church's mission. Jesus proclaimed, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." In our efforts to make disciples, we have a tendency to draw on texts like this from the New Testament, where we find Jesus' teachings and commands. However, as Tim Keller notes, "All biblical doctrine is necessary background for understanding the Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Missiologist Arthur Glasser concurs, writing, "The whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is a missionary book, the revelation of God's purpose and action in mission in human history."<sup>2</sup> Comments like these open many new possibilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 17.



In *The Mission of God's People*, Christopher Wright invites worship leaders to consider a broader understanding of God's mission, one that encompasses both the Old and New Testaments, for "the New Testament church did not actually have a New Testament when they set out on the task of world mission."<sup>3</sup> Just as Paul referenced Isaiah in his message to the people of Antioch (Acts 13), and Jesus began with the prophets on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), contemporary preachers can draw on the full wealth of the Old and New Testaments to interpret God's grand narrative and identify points of intersection with contemporary people "*in order to make sense of the story so far* – the story that led up to Jesus himself, the whole point, purpose and destination of the story. . . . [and] *in order to make sense of the story from there on.*"<sup>4</sup>

Along this line of thinking, Alan Roxburgh encourages a movement beyond Matthew 28, given not only the missional history of the New Testament church, but the missional history of the *Western* church:

Overall . . . the interpretation of Matthew 28 came directly out of the sense of power and authority that we in modern Western culture have. Why did this text become so central to our imagination? Could it have been, again, that for most of the twentieth century, when evangelicalism was in a defensive posture in the culture, this text seemed to endow us with power and authority from God, actually affirming what we already have? We read this text, not as a challenge to go out into the world, but rather as an affirmation of the power and authority we believed God had given us.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 138.

Instead, Roxburgh suggests the church use Luke 10:1-12, where Jesus does not just *tell* the disciples to go, he actually *sends* them out to go into the homes of their neighbors. “Here’s the question I want us to explore: what if God is saying to us that the imperialism, authority, and control that have been behind our use of Matthew 28 are over and that the ways in which we will rediscover the gospel is by becoming a Luke 10 people?”<sup>6</sup> We will return to Roxburgh’s question at the end of this chapter.

No matter where we read in Scripture, many people seem to think of worship and mission as two distinct activities. For example, many congregations have a “Worship Committee” and a “Mission Committee.” Roxburgh and others would suggest this division creates a false dichotomy. For the purpose of this thesis project, it is important to see that such a division, such a false dichotomy, *affects* the reading of Scripture, forcing the reader to categorize the focus of any given pericope as one or the other – worship *or* mission. Hence, in searching for missional texts, many readers look for passages that explicitly talk about mission or Jesus’ sending of his disciples, such as when Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).

What if we were to read Scripture – all of it, Keller claims – as background *for* the gospel and see the commands of Scripture as part of a more holistic obedience to God? Thus, instead of choosing texts that directly address “worship” or “mission,” we might take a different approach, as outlined by James K.A. Smith:

It’s not a matter of choosing between worship *or* mission; nor are we faced with the false dichotomy of church *or* world, cathedral *or* city. To the contrast, we worship *for* mission; we gather *for* sending; we center ourselves in the practices

---

<sup>6</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 139.

of the body of Christ *for the sake of* the world; we are reformed in the cathedral to undertake our image-bearing commission to reform the city.<sup>7</sup>

We might then no longer think of worship *and* mission or even worship *for* mission; it is all about worship. As Clayton J. Schmit summarizes, “One of the key motifs of the missional church is that all of life is worship.”<sup>8</sup>

John Piper stresses Schmit’s point further: It is not just that “we worship *for* mission”; if we truly worshipped God for all God is worth, mission might not need to exist:

Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.<sup>9</sup>

According to Piper, mission is what it is because worship is what it isn’t.

Any way you examine them, worship and mission are not at odds. Wright contends it is important to understand that “the ultimate reason for the church’s existence is to glorify God by worshiping and enjoying him for all eternity. And because the world is still full of people who are *not* worshiping and enjoying the living God, the mission of the church is to bring them into the fold of those who do.”<sup>10</sup> Wright continues,

---

<sup>7</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 154.

<sup>8</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 48.

<sup>9</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 244.

The goal of all our mission is the worship and glory of the one true living God. That's because the goal of *all* human life is to love, worship, glorify, and enjoy God. . . . To put it another way, we are most fully ourselves as human beings when we are in a relationship with God in which God is glorified in and through our enjoyment of that relationship. . . . The *mission of God*, therefore, is that dynamic divine love that drives God to seek the ultimate well-being and blessing of human beings by bringing them into a relationship with himself in which they love, worship, and glorify him, and find their greatest joy in doing so. So also *the mission of God's people* is to be agents of that redemptive love of God. We live to bring others to worship and glorify the living God, for that is where they will find their greatest and eternal fulfillment and joy. For that reason, we should see evangelism not as something we are imposing on others but as the best thing we could ever do for them in the long run.<sup>11</sup>

Wright's point is challenging: Do congregations see *evangelism* in this way? Moreover, do they see *worship* this way – where they find their “greatest and eternal fulfillment and joy” because they are doing that for which they were created, worshiping the one true living God? Do worshipers, both leaders and lay people, see *themselves* in this way – “agents of God's redemptive love” whose goal is to help people find that deep joy?

Seeing evangelism, worship, and worshipers in this way begins by seeing Scripture this way. What if the lens through which the Story of Scripture is read is not that of mission, but of worship? If “all of life is worship,” then all of God's Story in Scripture is worship – and God's mission is found in the Story told in worship. When the reader looks at Scripture through this lens, the discovery might be the same as that of Al Tizon:

The unity of worship and mission permeates the whole of Scripture, from the upward and outward nature of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) to the prophets' dual call to spiritual fidelity and social justice (Hosea 3:1-5, Isaiah 1:12-17) to the apostles' acts of ecstatic praise and fervent missionary zeal

---

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 244-245.

throughout the known world (Acts 2). But we encounter this unity most clearly in Jesus himself . . .<sup>12</sup>

While the whole of Scripture cannot be adequately covered here, this chapter reviews some key texts of Scripture in order to help missional preachers expand their usual “canon” and see the Bible as “wholly and thoroughly missional.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Recalling the Call to Retell the Story: Deuteronomy 6**

As this thesis-project began with God’s command to retell the story in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6, it is appropriate that this chapter’s overview of Scripture begin as well with the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). When Moses shared the first command of God, he said, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deuteronomy 5:7). In Chapter 6, Moses called Israel to hear the “primary commandment in the positive.”<sup>14</sup> While the statement “the Lord alone” addresses the number of gods – one – Israel was to have, there was a larger identifying question to consider as they prepared for life in the promised land: “Within the immediate and broader contexts, the purpose of this statement is not to answer the question, ‘How many is God?’ but ‘Who is the God of Israel?’ To this question the Israelites were to respond in unison and without compromise or equivocation, ‘Our God

---

<sup>12</sup> Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Tizon, *Missional Preaching*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 98.

is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!”<sup>15</sup> Moses’ concern was not only Israel’s belief in *one* god in the midst of polytheistic Canaan, but their exclusive *devotion* to *the one true God*: “This is not strictly a monotheistic confession (cf. 4:35, 39) but a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment that defines the boundaries of a covenant community. It consists of those who claim the utterance as a verbal badge of identity and who demonstrate this identity with uncompromising covenant commitment . . . .”<sup>16</sup>

Patrick Miller notes two defining qualities of this covenant commitment, confession and demand: “Israel’s identity as a people [is] defined by this confession, ‘Our God is the Lord, the Lord alone,’ and this demand, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’”<sup>17</sup> Regarding the importance of confession to the covenant community, Miller asserts, “In the opening words, ‘The Lord is our God,’ a claim is laid on them, a confession is made by them that will serve to shape their identity and their way in the world in the profoundest way possible.”<sup>18</sup> In one of his sermons, John Calvin named the way this confession shaped their identity and way in the world as directly related to the demand:

Thou shalt love God with all thy soul, is as much as to say thou shalt not spare thy life for the love of thy God. . . . Thou shalt love thy God with all thy mind or heart, betokeneth with them but as it were a comparison, so as a man should prefer God above all other things . . . and finally, thou shalt love God with all thy

---

<sup>15</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 182.

<sup>16</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 182.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 98.

strength, imparted among them, that thou must love him with all thy substance and all thy goods, as if the case required that thou shouldest be impoverished.<sup>19</sup>

In response to Calvin's sermon, Miller concludes, "The oneness of the Lord your God is matched by the oneness and totality of your devotion."<sup>20</sup>

Commanding "love" is critical to a covenant community and especially a worshiping covenant community. As noted in Chapter One, James K.A. Smith contends, "'We are what we love' amounts to 'we are what we worship.'"<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it seems logical, even imperative, that the one true God, the one who alone is deserving of worship, should command the love of his people. This command to love, that is, command to worship, is found throughout Scripture, particularly in the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-133), the hymnbook of Israel. Psalm 122 draws on this very law from Deuteronomy in its invitation to worship:

With joy I heard them say,  
"Let us go to the Lord's house!"  
And now, Jerusalem,  
we stand inside your gates.

Jerusalem, the city so built  
that city and temple are one.  
To you the tribes go up,  
every tribe of the Lord.

It is the *law* of Israel  
to honor God's name. (Psalm 122:1-4, emphasis added)<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *The Sermons of John Calvin Upon the Fifth Book of Moses Called Deuteronomy* (London, England: Henry Middleton, 1583), 272, quoted in Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 103.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Gabe Huck, ed., *The Psalter* (Washington, D.C.: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, 1994), Psalm 122.

In accordance with this law, “Tribes of the Lord go up [to Jerusalem] to give thanks to the Lord as provided in the covenant order.”<sup>23</sup>

While Psalm 122 begins with an invitation to the community to worship together, Psalm 134 commands such worship. In one of the unique times the Hebrew “behold” is used with an imperative with the sense “Come”<sup>24</sup> – translated here as “Bless” – the Psalmist declares,

Bless the Lord,  
all who serve in God’s house,  
who stand watch  
throughout the night.

Lift up your hands  
in the holy place  
and bless the Lord.

And may God,  
the maker of earth and sky,  
bless you from Zion.<sup>25</sup>

As the opening verse of the Psalm commands the people to bless the Lord in accordance with the covenantal law, the closing verse reflects another critical part of covenant. When the people go up to Jerusalem to offer their blessings to the Lord in accordance with the law, they are reminded of the Lord’s blessings. “There they bless and are blessed.”<sup>26</sup> The God who demands the people’s full devotion has already shown his full

---

<sup>23</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 387.

<sup>24</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, Word (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 281.

<sup>25</sup> Huck, *Psalter*, Psalm 134.

<sup>26</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 387.



devotion to his people. Therefore, the God of covenant calls his covenantal people to worship: “Blessed is the congregation that insists that believers gather to worship God not, first of all, in order that God might bless them, but because God has already blessed them.”<sup>27</sup>

### **A New Covenant, the Same Call: Matthew 22**

If what we love leads to what we worship, if God’s command is to love him with all our heart, soul, and might, and if, when we go “up to the temple of Jerusalem” to bless God, we are reminded of how God has already blessed us, then what happens when we leave the “temple”? How do God’s people fulfill this law to worship? The answer is found in Jesus’ coming to establish a new covenant: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

In the earlier discussion on the unity between worship and mission, the section highlighted the insights of several liturgical theologians, including Al Tizon: “We encounter this unity most clearly in Jesus himself who, when asked by a testy lawyer which commandment was the greatest, replied,”<sup>28</sup> “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38). Jesus’ initial response likely did not come

---

<sup>27</sup> Emily R. Brink and Paul Detterman, *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 23.

<sup>28</sup> Tizon, *Missional Preaching*, 26.

as a surprise to the lawyer or other listeners, as he was quoting the *Shema*. Similar to Miller's commentary on Deuteronomy 6:4 about the identity of "God as *our* God Yahweh," Dale Bruner focuses on the pronoun in the command, claiming that "the one word 'your' has the entirety of the gospel in it":

Jesus does *not* command, "You shall love *God*." The God with whom Jesus faces his hearers is "*the Lord* your God," that is, *Yahweh*, the God with an address, the God of Israel, the God with a recorded history and with clear claims. . . . Thus, the love that Jesus (and Scripture) command is an *answering* love. We are not commanded to love a distant Great Being – a "God" – about whom we have only intimations, as a "love God!" demand could sound. We are directed to "love *the Lord your God*," the God who has already done great saving things for his people and for the world in Israel and now, supremely, in Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

"Our God, your God" has shown his love for us in Israel, and now, in Jesus, commands that we answer with love.

How shall God's people answer? Even though Jesus had not been asked for the "two main commandments in the law," Jesus gave a double answer, a "Double-Love Command,"<sup>30</sup> as if "he is saying in so many words that the question for *one* main principle is too narrow"<sup>31</sup>: "And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:39-40). The first commandment was not new to his hearers, nor is this one. Jesus is

---

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 412.

<sup>30</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 412.

<sup>31</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 414.

simply quoting another part of the law (Leviticus 19:18). “Jesus is unique, however, in *fusing* and explicitly *exalting* these two commandments above all the rest of the law.”<sup>32</sup>

What does Jesus mean when he fuses these commandments by saying, “And a second is like it” (Matthew 22:39a)? Al Tizon suggests that Jesus’ ordering of the commandments is more about origin than superiority:

Worship and mission have a causal unity between them; that is, one causes the other. The order in which Jesus lists the two Great Commandments is significant, because love for God (worship) is the source of love for neighbor (mission). Jesus’ language in speaking of the “first” and “second” Great Commandments does not speak to superiority so much as to origin – which of the two loves causes the other. To be clear: Worship inspires, motivates, and empowers mission. The church’s love for God propels it outward to demonstrate love for neighbor.<sup>33</sup>

Dale Bruner agrees, yet also stresses that, while one may cause the other, both parts of Jesus’ “Double-Love Command” carry equal importance in God’s covenant:

The first is first and the second is second, but the second is *equally as important* as the first. Only *together* in a nurturing mutuality is either love kept pure. A neighbor-minimizing love of God is as reprehensible to the prophetic Jesus as a God-minimizing love of neighbor is impossible for the pastoral Jesus.<sup>34</sup>

Just as the love commanded in Deuteronomy 6:5 calls for more than warm feelings, so the love commanded here goes beyond mere affection. “To love the neighbor is to imitate God by taking their needs seriously.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 412.

<sup>33</sup> Tizon, *Missional Preaching*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 414.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 260.

One command causes the other, yet both are equally important. In this sense, “worship and mission enjoy an interdependent unity”:

Worship depends on mission, and mission depends on worship. If we try to love God (worship) while neglecting justice, then God’s words through the prophets Amos (5:21-23), Micah (6:6-8), and Isaiah (1:11-17) indict us. . . . If, on the other hand, we try to love our neighbor without being fueled and refueled by God in worship, then mission is rendered ineffectual. How can the church possibly address the overwhelming needs of the world without the input of God’s wisdom, power, and love? . . . Simply put, if the church does not engage in mission, then it cannot truly worship; conversely, if the church does not worship, then it cannot truly do mission.<sup>36</sup>

In reflecting on these same prophetic texts, Mark Labberton maintains, “Faithful worship either does justice or risks being neither faithful nor worship.”<sup>37</sup> In sum, if worship does not fuse and exalt this double command, then the church risks being unfaithful to God’s Story – and thereby risks not being the church.

### **The Old and New Covenant: Call to Missional Praise**

While, according to Dale Bruner, Jesus is the first to fuse and explicitly exalt these two commandments – love of God and love of neighbor - the two have been *implicitly* fused and exalted throughout Scripture. Christopher Wright asks an important theological question, “For what do God’s people exist?”<sup>38</sup> More specifically, when

---

<sup>36</sup> Tizon, *Missional Preaching*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 28.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 247.

looking at the Old Testament, “Was Israel created for the sake of the nations or for the sake of God’s glory and praise? The answer, of course, is - both.”<sup>39</sup>

Psalm 100 is one of the texts that makes this double purpose clearest. “Its liturgical subject is the movement into the presence of God, the first and fundamental act that constitutes worship”<sup>40</sup>:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he that made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him, bless his name.  
For the Lord is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.

While this invitation to move into God’s presence is no different, the *overall* movement of the Psalm is distinct. Looking at this song verse by verse, Wright observes,

[Psalm 100] puts the fact that Israel is created by and belonging to God (v. 3) right in the middle of the summons to worship and praise him, found on either side (vv. 2 and 4). This is, indeed, universalized horizontally to “all the earth” (v. 1) and vertically to “all generations” (v. 5). In other words, Israel’s existence as a people created for the praise of God (vv. 2-4) is bound up with the glory of God that fills all space and all history (vv. 1 and 5).<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 247-248.

<sup>40</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 317.

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 248.

With this movement, “Psalm 100 initiates worship *and* sets forth a theology of worship”<sup>42</sup> – and thereby simultaneously a theology of mission. For what do God’s people exist? They exist for “missional praise”: “The mission of God’s people, then, is derived from the fact that they were created to bring praise and glory to God *and* to bring the nations of the world into the same orchestra of doxology.”<sup>43</sup>

### **The Church’s Call to Missional Praise**

As the mission of God’s people Israel was to invite people into the orchestra of doxology, so is the mission of God’s people the Church. In Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls the church to a constant chorus of doxology:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— *to the praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit

---

<sup>42</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 317.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 248.

guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14, emphasis added)<sup>44</sup>

Later in the letter, Paul states that “through [Christ] we both have access to the Father through the same Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18).<sup>45</sup> If one wants a Christian understanding of worship, says Robin Parry,

The place to begin is with the ancient Christian doxology “Glory be to the Father, *through* the Son in the Holy Spirit.” The roots of this doxology are found in the deep structures of New Testament thought that bubble up in Ephesians 2:18: “*Through* him [the Son] we both have access *to* the Father *by* one Spirit.” There it is in black and white. As Christians, we come first and foremost *to* the Father, the first person of the Trinity. We come to him *through* the work of the Son, *enabled* by the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup>

Parry uses this text as a definition of worship. Simon Chan uses the same text as a definition of mission: “Mission . . . must be defined in the largest sense, which is the fulfillment of God's ultimate reason for the church's existence: ‘to the praise of his glory’ (Ephesians 1:12).”<sup>47</sup>

The question then becomes, is this text about worship or about mission? As noted earlier, it is not a matter of choosing between worship or mission. In fact, Paul does not give the church a choice to make. In these texts, he never mentions the word “worship,” nor does he use the word “mission.” Instead, he simply refers to our being, constantly repeating that doxological refrain, “in order that we . . . might be for the

---

<sup>44</sup> New International Version, 1995.

<sup>45</sup> New International Version, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 71.

<sup>47</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 40.

praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12). That is the church’s calling, from “before the foundation of the world” to the “fullness of time,” to live – in the cathedral and in the city – for the praise of his glory, now and forevermore.

N.T. Wright responds that it is about *Story*. As Christopher Wright considers the movement of Psalm 100 verse by verse, N.T. Wright considers the movement of this passage verse by verse:

The entire prayer, all eleven verses of it, is woven through and through with the story of what God has done in Jesus the Messiah. He has blessed us in the king (verse 3); he chose us in him (verse 4), foreordained us through him (verse 5), poured grace on us in him (verse 6), gave us redemption in him (verse 7), set out his plan in him (verse 9), intending to sum up everything in him (verse 10). We have obtained our inheritance in him (verse 11), because we have set our hope on him (verse 12), and have been sealed in him with the spirit as the guarantee of what is to come (verses 13-14).<sup>48</sup>

This way of being, of life, of worship for Christians, he continues, will always involve telling this Story: “All genuine Christian life and worship flows out of worship. True worship of the true God cannot help telling and retelling, with joy and amazement, the story of what God has done for us in Jesus the Messiah. Enjoy the view. You won’t get a better one.”<sup>49</sup>

This integral view of “the *worshipping* life of God’s people and their *missional* function of extending that worship among the nations”<sup>50</sup> continues in Peter’s First Epistle:

---

<sup>48</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone, The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). 5-6.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 249.



But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)<sup>51</sup>

Peter makes a "double point," says Christopher Wright: "First, just as Christians inherit the identity and titles of Old Testament Israel (a chosen, holy people belonging to God), so also they inherit the purpose of Israel's creation and redemption (to declare the praise of God and bring glory to him)."<sup>52</sup> Joel Green also notes the connection between Peter's references to Old Testament identity and titles and the church's purpose:

Although Peter's language does not replicate the terminology of the OT, analogs do appear in Exod. 19:5 ("my treasured possession") and Isa. 43:21 ("the people whom I formed for myself"). . . . Similar language used to describe the reformation of Israel – "chosen people" and "the people whom I formed for myself" – leads to a similar vocation: "to declare my praise" (Isaiah 43:20-21).<sup>53</sup>

Comparable to Christopher Wright's observation that Psalm 100's summons to praise God is "universalized horizontally 'all the earth' and vertically to 'all generations,'"<sup>54</sup> Green says of Peter's letter, "'Praise' is expanded to include not only vertical language (worship) but also horizontal (proclamation), and has been given a particular content. This is God's mighty deeds, and especially the act on which Christian conversion is based – namely, the saving death of Jesus Christ and God's having raised him from the dead."<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> New International Version, 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 250.

<sup>53</sup> Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 62.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 248.

<sup>55</sup> Green, *1 Peter*, 63.

While the specific *titles* for God's people – “my chosen people,” “the people whom I formed for myself” – were given during the time of the exodus and the prophets, the call to *be* God's people came in Genesis, in God's call to Abram: “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing’” (Genesis 12:1-2). In considering God's call thus far in Genesis, Walter Brueggemann contends, “The first call of God is in calling the worlds into being, the work of creation. In this second call . . . God calls an alternative community. . . . God calls the hopeless ones into a community with a future. He calls the fixed ones into pilgrimage.”<sup>56</sup> God calls the hopeless and fixed ones – “those who were not a people” (1 Peter 2:10) – to be God's people on a pilgrimage with a future. This same calling continues today for the church. “The church is nothing less than the multinational fulfillment of the hope of Israel, that all nations will be blessed through the people of Abraham.”<sup>57</sup> As the people of Abraham, God's people Israel and now God's people the Church are those invited into a pilgrimage of being a blessing to the nation.

This multinational fulfillment of the titles and vocation of Israel leads to the second of Peter's double points:

The purpose of such declarative praise is not a private affair between God and the worshipers, but it spills out into the public arena as one of the means by which God draws the nations to himself. It is, in other words, part of what it

---

<sup>56</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 117-118.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 43.

means to fulfill the Abrahamic commission of being God's people for the sake of the rest of the nations coming to enjoy God's blessing.<sup>58</sup>

That is the church's co-mission, a dual mission of praise and declaration - the mission, that is, of worship: "The praise of God's people is missional. The mission of God's people includes doxology."<sup>59</sup>

### **A Co-Mission Beyond, But Not Excluding, the Great Commission**

This co-command of Jesus and co-mission of the church leads back to the prior discussion of Jesus' Great Commission of the Church in Matthew 28:18-20. Recall Alan Roxburgh's desire for the church to move away from using this text as its missional mandate that stems from the imperialism, by which its use has marked the church's history: "What if God is saying that the imperialism, authority, and control that have been behind our use of Matthew 28 are over and that the ways in which we will rediscover the gospel is by becoming a Luke 10 people?"<sup>60</sup> Roxburgh contends that the Western church often relies on its own power, its own resources, and its own assumption about what others need. "When we send people out with baggage, we lose two things – the ability to see people and their needs as they really are and an openness to what God is doing. We objectify people."<sup>61</sup> In Luke 10, Jesus invited the disciples to

---

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 250.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 250.

<sup>60</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 139.

<sup>61</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 126.

set aside their baggage, saying, “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road” (Luke 10:4). Based on this command, Roxburgh concludes, “We must leave our baggage behind and be willing to become like a stranger in need of the welcome and care of the other if we stand any chance of answering, ‘What is God up to in the world today?’”<sup>62</sup> In order to answer this question, and thereby rediscover the gospel, we must become a Luke 10 people, says Roxburgh.

But if, as Keller says, all of Scripture is background to understanding the gospel and, indeed, this Matthean text is part of the gospel, then it seems we rediscover the gospel, not by moving away from this text, but by rediscovering the meaning of it.

“There are, in the end, only two questions to ask as we read the Bible: Is it about me? Or is it about Jesus?”<sup>63</sup> Roxburgh’s concern is that the church reads this text, “not as a *challenge* to go out into the world, but rather as an *affirmation* of the power and authority we believed God had given us (emphasis added).”<sup>64</sup> When we read it in this manner, we make the passage about “us.”

In response to Keller’s question, Matthew 28:18-20 is about *Jesus*, as evidenced by the opening words. “The Great Commission is prefaced with one of the most important Christological statements in the First Gospel: ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 127.

<sup>63</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 333.

In addition to identifying the subject of a biblical passage, Keller encourages the reader to ask whose mission is addressed in the text. “In other words, is the Bible basically about what *I* must do or what *he* has done?”<sup>66</sup> Roxburgh’s concern seems to be a focus on what we do - carry baggage (our resources) versus *not* carry baggage (Luke 10). Yet, here again, the text makes clear it is not about what we do, but about what Jesus has already done. “The Great Commission is thus founded on Jesus’ *present* Lordship (note the ‘therefore’ of v. 19)”<sup>67</sup>: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matthew 28:18-19, emphasis added).

Jesus gave three instructions: “*Go and make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* them to obey everything that I have commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis added). Congregations often focus on these verses – who we are and what we are to do. We might even only cite these verses as the Great Co-mission. N.T. Wright reminds the church:

The three instructions he has given are held in place by the promises at the beginning and the end of the passage. The reason we are to do these things is because he already possesses all authority; the promise that sustains us in the task is that he is with us always and forever. He is . . . the Emmanuel. God-with-us-turns into Jesus-with-us. There is no greater personal promise than that.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 333.

<sup>68</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004), 209.

In liturgical terms, one might say that the three instructions – or rather, the one instruction (“Go”) with three parts – are bracketed by a “call to worship” and a “blessing”: Come and acknowledge the One, the only One, to whom all authority has been given, and go with the assurance that he is with you “always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The instructions – again, in liturgical terms, the “charge” - are found between this call to worship and the blessing:

The claim is that [Jesus] is working to take [the world] from where it was – under the rule not only of death, but of corruption, greed, and every kind of wickedness – and to bring it, by slow means and quick, under the rule of his life-giving love. And how is he doing this? Here is the shock: *through us, his followers*. The project only goes forward in so far as Jesus’ agents, the people he has commissioned, are taking it forward. . . . those who believe in Jesus, who are witnesses to his resurrection, are given the responsibility to go and make real in the world the authority which he already has. This, after all, is part of the answer to the prayer that God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. If we pray that prayer, we shouldn’t be surprised if we are called upon to bring about God’s answer to it.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2*, 207. N.T. Wright references “the Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13). “The only other time in the Gospels when Jesus explicitly tells the disciples *what* to pray – and it is unmistakably missional – in context and content,” says Christopher Wright, is recorded in Matthew 9:38: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Hugh Palmer, Rector of All Saints Church, Langham Place, London, England, calls it “the other Lord’s Prayer.” Much like Roxburgh wonders what would happen if the church were to become a Luke 10 people, rather than a Matthew 28 people, Palmer wonders, “Why . . . do we use the ‘Our Father’ prayer so regularly in Christian liturgy, and this ‘other Lord’s prayer’ so spasmodically? What might have been the story of Christian mission if *this* prayer had been the one we had memorized and repeated (and meant) down through the centuries? Of course, it’s a dangerous prayer to pray, as the disciples found. For if they did as Jesus told them, the very next thing that happens is that they become the answer to their own prayer as Jesus sends them out (Matt. 10)” (Hugh Palmer, as referenced in Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 257-258). N.T. Wright would agree that this prayer is a dangerous prayer to pray, for in his commentary on Matthew 9:38, he says, “As [Jesus’] followers pray that prayer, the answer comes back worryingly quick: you, yourselves, are to be the answer to your own prayer” (N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 110). In response to Palmer’s question, “What might have become of the story of Christian mission if we had prayed [‘this other Lord’s Prayer’] – and meant it?”, N.T. Wright might respond, “What might become of the story of Christian mission if we prayed *this* Lord’s Prayer – and meant it?”: “Bread, forgiveness, and deliverance are, of course, always going to be needed. But there will come a time when those needs are swallowed up in the complete life of the new age . . . Every time we say the words ‘Our Father . . .’ we are pleading for that day to be soon, and pledging ourselves to work

In light of this bracketing of instructions between the promise of Jesus' authority and the promise of his presence, it seems clear this passage is not about what we are to do, but what Jesus has already done: "The disciples who go into the world are instruments of *Jesus'* activity."<sup>70</sup>

Becoming a Matthew 28 people does not mean abandoning the becoming of a Luke 10 people. As worship and mission share an interdependent unity, so do these texts – one cannot function without the other. Recall Bruner's commentary on Matthew 22: "A neighbor-minimizing love of God is as reprehensible to the prophetic Jesus as a God-minimizing love of neighbor is impossible for the pastoral Jesus."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, emphasizing one of these Gospel texts over the other is "reprehensible." Emphasizing Luke 10 over Matthew 28 causes identification without purpose: "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:2). Emphasizing Matthew 28 over Luke 10 breeds mission without compassion: "Go and make disciples..." (Matthew 28:19). Indeed, all biblical doctrine is necessary background for understanding the gospel.

From Keller's understanding, "The gospel makes us both humble and confident."<sup>72</sup> What keeps congregations from imperialistic, authoritative, controlling

---

to bring it closer" (N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2*, 210). I will return to this point about repetition of liturgy and meaning it with each repetition in Chapter Three.

<sup>70</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 335.

<sup>71</sup> Bruner, *Matthew*, 414.

<sup>72</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 116.

tendencies as they “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19)? It is the fact that it is not about the church’s authority, but Jesus’: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore . . .” (Matthew 28:19). The gospel makes us humble. What enables congregations to “go,” carrying nothing with them and entering others’ homes as strangers dependent on whatever they provide (Luke 10:3-7)? It is the fact that they go, relying fully on that authority given to Jesus and the promise that he is with us. The gospel makes us confident.

Moreover, the gospel makes us *joyful*, for as Jesus said at the end of the Luke 10 pericope, “See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the powers of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:19-20). In response to Keller’s questions, it is not about me; it is about Jesus. Further, it is not about what I have to do; it is about what Jesus has already done.

Further still, in terms of the church’s worship and mission, it is not about us and what we are to do – our *co-mission* to praise and to declare what God has done. It is about the humility and confidence that come from being *commissioned* by and with Jesus to be his gospel people. To borrow from N.T. Wright’s earlier words, enjoy the promise – we won’t get a better one.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 6.



## CHAPTER THREE

### WORSHIP: WHEN GOD’S STORY AND THE HUMAN STORY MEET

If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

— Antione de Saint-Exupery

What is worship, and how does worship work? Often worship leaders ask the second question, focusing on the practical details of worship, its planning, style and song selection, but neglect the first question. When we begin with the “how” of worship without first understanding the “what” of worship, worship leaders, and, in turn, those whom they lead, may miss the biblical picture of the Church’s gathering. The result is worship that might “work” at a certain level, but misses the larger opportunity to connect our stories with God’s greater Story in transformative ways. Many liturgical theologians and architects are challenging worship leaders to revisit the “what” of worship and let the “what” inform the “how.” This chapter first considers some larger “how” questions – how humanity and the world work, how imagination works, how story works – in order to explore how, in worship, we are invited into God’s Big Story. Then the chapter examines specific issues involved in the telling of the Story. Finally, the focus shifts to how telling the Story in worship invites us to experience God’s Big Story in new and more imaginative ways.

## How Humanity Works . . . and How the World Works

“I think; therefore, I am.”<sup>1</sup> This intellectualist approach of Rene Descartes has often been applied to worship, assuming that “what I *do* is the outcome of what I *think*.”<sup>2</sup> In *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, James K.A. Smith invites us to contemplate a different approach. Recall his question from Chapter One, “What if we are actors before we are thinkers?”<sup>3</sup>

For Tim Keller, this question is especially important to consider with respect to a congregation’s historical tradition. Every tradition has a particular center that defines its worship. According to Keller, “The difference between more sacrament-centered liturgical worship and more Word- or sermon-centered worship is based in large part on different understandings of how God communicates grace, of how spiritual growth occurs, and of the relationship of doctrine and experience.”<sup>4</sup> In the Reformed Tradition of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the context of this project, the fourfold order of worship is highly Word-centered: gathering around the Word, proclaiming the Word, responding to the Word, and bearing and following the Word into the world.<sup>5</sup> As rich as the Reformed Tradition is, it also has its challenges. A focus on the Word may lead to a

---

<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 18.

<sup>2</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 299.

<sup>5</sup> *Book of Order 2015-2017*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2015), W-3.3202.

focus on the *written* word, the *spoken* word, or the *eloquent* word. Hence, those who are nurtured in the Reformed Tradition may engage the mind of the worshiper while forgetting that the worshiper has a heart and will that equally need to be engaged. How does a worship leader honor a tradition that centers on the Word in a way that reaches the heart, mind, and will of those in the community?

Again, Smith's question, "What if we are actors before we are thinkers?"

Consider the possibility that holistic spiritual growth is fostered primarily by what we *don't* think about: "The driving center of human action and behavior is a nexus of loves, longings, and habits that hums under the hood, so to speak, *without needing to be thought about*. Those loves, longings, and habits orient our being-in-the-world."<sup>6</sup> The intellect may be important in worshipers' evaluation of the world, but the emotions are important in their perception of it.<sup>7</sup> In other words, for worship to "work," it must appeal to the emotions.

Clayton Schmit agrees that worship has an aesthetic effect that goes beyond the intellect. In speaking of the centrality of the Word, he affirms Saint Augustine's exhortation to "sway the mind so as to subdue the will."<sup>8</sup> However, Schmit also stresses the role of the heart and its longings: "The communion of worship is no shallow stream, but a deep river into which our souls dive to find comfort and contentment. This cannot

---

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (New York, NY: Eternal Sun Books, 2016), 113. Referenced in Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 62.

be measured, but it can be known and felt.”<sup>9</sup> Smith concurs, “The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing – which is just to say that the heart has a story to tell and loves to hear one told.”<sup>10</sup>

To explain how the heart relates to story, Schmit compares worship to a work of art: “Worship is an art. . . . it does what art does. It contains forms that provide conveyance to deeply held things.”<sup>11</sup> Some might argue that this understanding of worship can quickly become consumerist and lose its focus on the adoration of God when worship is evaluated based on how it makes us feel: “Did I like that song, sermon, prayer, etc.? Did worship make me feel good?”

In response, Smith distinguishes between “emotions” and “feelings.” Citing Mark Johnson from *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, Smith observes, “‘Emotional responses can occur long before we become aware that we are feeling an emotion.’ . . . Feeling is conscious, emotion is unconscious, and awareness operates along a continuum.”<sup>12</sup> Smith’s point is not that the worship leader appeal *solely* to feelings, but that the *whole person* be engaged in the act of worship, that worship become an experience of our bodies, minds, and environment. “Any meaning is generated at the nexus of all three.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 91.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 59, quoted in Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 111.

This nexus is critical. Any understanding of how worship works requires some understanding of how humanity works. Recall Smith's proposition that "the driving center of human action is a nexus of loves, longings and habits."<sup>14</sup> Smith refers to this collection of habits as "*habitus*...that nexus of dispositions by which we constitute our world without rational deliberation or conscious awareness."<sup>15</sup>

To underscore the importance of *habitus*, Smith cites the research of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. While using the term *habitus*, Bourdieu also employs the term "bodily hexis:" "Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking."<sup>16</sup> Drawing on Bourdieu's research and his own, Smith concludes, "In this way a worldview is materialized, incarnated."<sup>17</sup>

Smith's use of the word "incarnated" is intentional, as it speaks, not only to how humans embody the world, but to how *Jesus* embodied the world. According to Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, sociology may *encourage* us to consider the whole person in Christian formation, whereas the incarnation *insists* that we do so. While they, too, are aware of the risks of appealing to people's feelings in worship,<sup>18</sup> they are equally aware

---

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69-70.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra relate a story Tod Bolsinger shared about his music director's changing the arrangement of "the Doxology." One person remarked afterwards, "You ruined *my* song." Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 189.

of the *greater* risks of appealing only to the intellect: “Protestants especially have a tendency to consider words and thoughts more important than the body and physical things. But this is a disincarnational attitude. The Word became flesh. *We* are flesh.”<sup>19</sup>

Being incarnational also involves the mind. Scripture speaks of letting “the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5) and of having the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). However, the biblical writers’ understanding of “the mind” was more holistic than the contemporary Western understanding. Western culture tends to view the mind as a faculty for depositing information. In his commentary on Philippians 2:5, Stephen Fowl indicates that the Greek word commonly translated as “mind” encompasses more than a receptacle for thought; a more accurate translation of “the mind of Christ” is “a *pattern* of thinking, feeling, and acting (emphasis added).”<sup>20</sup> In the biblical understanding, “‘mind’ is not a given, a priori reality and should not be thought of as a substance.”<sup>21</sup> Again from Mark Johnson,

[The] mind emerges. It emerges as, and is enacted through, social cognition. I think it is therefore accurate to say that we are not born with minds fully formed and ready for thinking. Instead, we “acquire” minds through our coordinated sharing of meaning and our concomitant ability to engage in symbolic interaction. . . . Mind is an achievement, not a pre-given faculty.<sup>22</sup>

Smith agrees: “Thus our capacities *become* ‘mind,’ as something acquired. This picture might also change what we think it is to have ‘the mind of Christ’ (I Cor. 2:16): perhaps

---

<sup>19</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 234.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 90.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 114.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, *Meaning of the Body*, 151-152.

the mind of Christ is also something that is *acquired* through practice and formation, something that emerges as a result of sanctification rather than informational deposit.”<sup>23</sup> Like the heart and flesh, the mind is a vehicle for transformation by the acquisition – new and renewed - of God’s Story (Romans 12:2).

This broader definition of the mind and its acquisition of meaning directly relates to worship. To expand on Smith’s point from Chapter One,

‘We are what we love’ amounts to ‘we are what we worship’ . . . we are *liturgical* animals: in some fundamental way, we construct our world and act within it on the basis of what we worship. . . .  
. . . In short, our action emerges from how we *imagine* the world. What we do is driven by who we are, by the kind of person we have become.<sup>24</sup>

The world knows this to be true. The question is, does the Church?

Again, recall Smith’s caution concerning how worship leaders neglect the role of the emotions, perceptions, and aesthetic values, while the world capitalizes on them:

We have too often pursued flawed models of discipleship and Christian formation that have focused on convincing the intellect rather than recruiting the imagination. Moreover, because of this neglect and our stunted anthropology, we have failed to recognize the degree and the extent to which secular liturgies *do* implicitly capitalize on our embodied penchant for storied formation. This becomes a way to account for Christian assimilation to consumerism, nationalism, and various stripes of egoisms. These isms have had all the best embodied stories. The devil has had all the best liturgies.<sup>25</sup>

Advertisers prove that Smith is correct. Hallmark cards and their movies appeal to our affective side and love of story. Fast-food chains insist we can “have it our way.” “Selfie” photos flood social media. Even the “i-” prefix in the name of every Apple product

---

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 27, 31-32.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 39-40.

suggests the human desire to embody the world as “I.” In the midst of the world’s liturgies, how do we as Christ followers, who believe we are called to the community of Christ, cultivate a desire to embody the world as “we”?

It comes by the story we tell.

### **From story to Story**

Why is the story told in worship so important to human formation and, more specifically, *disciple* formation? Building on his thesis concerning the relationship between our loves and worship, Smith maintains that story orients our actions and loves: “I can’t answer the question, ‘What ought I to do?’ unless I have already answered a *prior* question, ‘Of which story am I a part?’”<sup>26</sup> Later, he adds, “I cannot answer the question, what do I love? without (at least implicitly) answering the question, what story do I believe? We tell ourselves in order to live.”<sup>27</sup> The world tells a story in its secular liturgies, liturgies that Michael Horton calls a “generational narcissism, in which the sociological ‘is’ determines the theological or practical ‘ought.’”<sup>28</sup> These liturgies “functionally tell the story that *I* am the center of the universe; that the world – and perhaps even God – exists for my pleasure; that ‘nature’

---

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108, 129-130.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 40.



is a fund of resources available for my use and disposal; that there is a kind of centripetal force tending toward *me* at the center.”<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to these secular liturgies is another liturgy of metaphors “that ‘picture’ the world as a home shared with others – a place that makes a claim upon me, shared with others who are both gifts and responsibilities, who bear the image of their Creator.”<sup>30</sup> As Smith summarizes, we have “two very different liturgies that generate contrasting metaphorical universes: the world as ‘nature’ versus the world as ‘creation.’ And our orientation – and hence our ‘understanding’ of our calling – would be fundamentally shaped at the level of conceptual metaphor.”<sup>31</sup> Which metaphor do we as worship leaders use, and which story do we tell?

Christian worship is designed to tell the Story<sup>32</sup> – God’s Big Story. We tell of Creation, how the world was supposed to be; the Fall, how we were separated from God; Redemption, how God brought us back into right relationship with him; and Restoration, how the world will be again one day. This fourfold Story shapes the fourfold order of worship – gathering, Word, response, sending.<sup>33</sup>

Still, several authors press a further question: which God? If what we love becomes what we worship, then N.T. Wright insists that who or what we worship is

---

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 124.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 124.

<sup>32</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 24. Rienstra and Rienstra also refer to this order. Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 235.

critical, claiming, “The place of Christian doctrine is absolutely vital. Christians are not defined by skin colour, by gender, by geographical location, or even, shockingly, by their good behavior. Nor are they defined by the particular type of religious feelings they may have. They are defined in terms of *the god they worship*.”<sup>34</sup> Note his intentional lowercase: in a world of competing metaphors and “rival discipleship,”<sup>35</sup> it is important to understand of which god - a god or *the* God - one is a disciple.

Many authors stress the importance of the Trinitarian nature of God. In

*Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, Robin Parry notes,

Christians are increasingly remembering that the Bible is not simply a list of things-to-believe and do, or a collection of timeless blessed thoughts that one can dip into at random. On the contrary, the Bible is a single story that runs from creation to new creation, from Genesis to Revelation. . . . The Trinitarian dimension of this story, however, has not been highlighted.<sup>36</sup>

The nature and story of the Triune God are central to our human nature and story. In Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let *us* make humankind in *our* image (emphasis added).” The use of second person plural pronouns indicates that all Persons of the Trinity were present and participatory in creation. “Once we see that the God whom we image is Trinity, we need to ask what it means to be in the image of the Trinity,” Parry

---

<sup>34</sup> N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 28.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 142.

<sup>36</sup> Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 16.

asserts. “. . . [R]elationship is integral to what it is to be in the image of God. . . . It is only in relationship that humans are able to work out the task of imaging God.”<sup>37</sup>

If worship leaders wish to change the cultural metaphor from embodying the “I” to embodying the “we,” worship must reflect and articulate the relational nature of God and the relational nature of the Church. “Being a follower of Jesus is all about being a part of God’s community. The *ekklesia* is the family of God sharing one Father, the body and bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit....The *ekklesia* is a Trinitarian creation.”<sup>38</sup> We, individually and corporately, were created in God’s image at Creation (past) and when Christ birthed the Church at Pentecost (also past). These “past” events continue to shape the present – and the future. According to James Torrance, Trinitarian worship

is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. It means participating in union with Christ, in what he has done for us once and for all, in his self-offering to the Father, in his life and death on the cross. It also means participating in what he is *continuing* to do in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world (emphasis added).<sup>39</sup>

As Jesus said, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do” (John 14:12a).

---

<sup>37</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 20-21.

Simon Chan also stresses the importance of the Trinitarian understanding of God on the present and future pulse of worship, how worship not only continues the work of the Triune God, but *extends* it:

[Worship] is no less than the continuation of the work of the triune God in the church until the eschaton. It is the progress of the gospel in the history of salvation. Worship is true to the degree that it corresponds to the work of the triune God and continues and extends the work of the triune God. . . . If it does not continue the action of the triune God, it is not worship in spirit and in truth.<sup>40</sup>

If the Triune relationship impacts the past, present, and future, then it also impacts how our history, or rather, our memory of history, relates to our imagination. C. Randall Bradley encourages worshipers to move toward the future while also appreciating the past: “In order to experience the freshness and newness of God, we must be continually moving past memory toward imagination. However, moving beyond memory doesn’t mean we forget our past.”<sup>41</sup> To forget our past would mean to deny our story, for our story, grounded in God’s Story since creation, shapes what we love, worship, and do. “God’s plan for humankind was to create a memory on which we can hang everything.”<sup>42</sup>

Bradley continues, “Memory should inform and change our present and future, and it should give us the freedom to create and take risks in order to continue God’s

---

<sup>40</sup> Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 61.

<sup>41</sup> C. Randall Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church’s Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

<sup>42</sup> Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 5.

creative work within us and within our faith community. We already live in the past (the already), but we must take the already (our memory) into the not yet.”<sup>43</sup>

In the words of James Smith, infused with other authors’ thoughts,

Christian formation is a conversion of the imagination effected by the Spirit, who recruits our most fundamental desires by a kind of narrative enchantment – by inviting us narrative [Trinitarian-imagined] animals into a [Trinitarian] story that seeps from our bones [memory] and becomes the background of our [present and future] being-in-the-world.<sup>44</sup>

That is how worship is intended to work.

### **Working It Out: The Work of Worship**

So what is the work of worship? For Bruce Ellis Benson, “Liturgy is (to cite the literal meaning of the term) truly ‘work,’ for it requires that we work hard to ‘hear’ God’s voice and to move into a posture of worship.”<sup>45</sup>

Smith also understands that embodying the Story is not automatic, but provisional:

We need to learn the true Story “by heart,” at a gut level, and let it seep into our background in order to then shape our perception of the world. And that happens primarily and normatively in the practices of Christian worship – *provided that* the practices of Christian worship intentionally carry, embody, enact, and rehearse the normative shape of the Christian Story. This opportunity – and qualification – should be occasion for a new intentionality and reflection about the shape of Christian worship, not just as an arena for our expression but as the formative space that sanctifies perception.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 31.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 163.

Many times the “work” of worship is focused on a particular “style” of worship.

In response to this tendency, John D. Witvliet warns,

One danger in all our discussions about worship style is that we will become so focused on talking about worship that we will actually fail to do it. Worship is about joyful and open listening to the proclamation of God’s Word. It is about feeding on the spiritual nourishment we receive from God in the Lord’s Supper. It is about offering honest and exuberant praise to a holy, righteous, and loving God. It is about honest confession and – often – lament. When our discussions about worship leave us with something less – when they leave us preoccupied with questions about worship style – we need discerning leaders to call us back to the heartfelt worship of a holy God.<sup>47</sup>

To navigate both Smith’s “opportunity” and Witvliet’s “danger” of worship, liturgical theologians can encourage leaders to consider four dynamics: Relationship, Relevance, Repetition, and Release.<sup>48</sup> Together these four shape the telling of God’s Story and, in turn, make worship “work.”

### Relationship

The Story of worship involves characters who relate to one another as the drama unfolds. Who are the actors, and who is the audience in the drama? Are the worship leaders the performers and the congregation the spectators? Are all worshipers the performers, and God is the audience? The answer is none of the above. God is not a spectator in worship; God is the *initiator*. “Worship is never something we do for God. All human attempts to initiate worship can only result in distorting the glory of God. The

---

<sup>47</sup> John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 278.

<sup>48</sup> This last word is used intentionally to make a point later in that section.

glory of God is the glory of his self-giving, and all true worship must begin with the truth that everything we are and have is a gift.”<sup>49</sup>

While worship is not an act we do for God, we are not spectators. “Instead, the biblical vision is one of co-abiding presence and participation.”<sup>50</sup> Drawing on this notion of co-abiding presence and participation, Schmit explains what happens in worship:

We need to remember there are no observers in worship. The typical way of describing this idea is to place God as the only audience in worship. All others are on stage, performing their roles, even if from the pews. For example, Robert Webber, following a famous image from Soren Kierkegaard, has said, “Worship is a drama played out before God by all the people. The worship leaders are the prompters, the people are the players, and God is in the audience.” This image brings us halfway to a complete understanding of the work done in worship. What is missing are the crucial and central roles that God plays in worship. The Holy Spirit calls the church and gathers it for adoration. God speaks through the Word read and proclaimed, making Christ present. God moves in baptism and the Eucharist, and the Spirit sends us forth in action. Clearly, God is not an idle auditor in worship but its chief agent. “God has a share in the activity of worship. Which share? The lion’s share.”<sup>51</sup>

In worship, we relate with God and with one another in a grand drama in which God gives us the privilege of participating.

The language of worship communicates these relationships – what we believe about God and what we believe about God’s people. Recall Parry’s assessment that the Trinitarian dimension of God’s Story has not always been highlighted in the Church – especially in worship. When I was received as a member of the Presbytery, one

---

<sup>49</sup> Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 91-92. The first quote Schmit cites is from Robert Webber’s *Worship Old and New*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 213. The second is from Schmit’s other work *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 32.

commissioner asked me to respond to the statement, “We profess a Trinitarian faith, but we often practice a binarian faith.” She notably did not specify *which* two members of the Trinity we practice, and rightly so, for I have observed that, while we may differ in which Persons we emphasize, many congregations tend to focus on one or two Persons to the neglect of the other(s).

To communicate our relationship with the Triune God, our liturgy needs to “name, explain, and worship the Trinity”<sup>52</sup> – that is, all Three Persons. The specific names used are important. In response to the popular use of “Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver,” Parry reminds us that “every action of God is an action of the whole Trinity. We should not assume that creation is what the Father does, redemption is what the Son does, and giving life is what the Spirit does.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the names “Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer” denote a function, whereas the names “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” connote a relationship – the *perichoresis* – the kind of relationship that has existed since before creation among the Trinity, the kind of relationship into which we are invited in worship.

In addition to naming the Trinity, Parry encourages leaders to *explain* the Trinity: theology matters. As an example, prayer communicates theology:

If prayer is like fire, then theology is an important part of the fuel we burn. Praying “three-person” prayers requires some theological fuel, and this means that we need to learn about the Trinity. . . .  
. . . If you are leading the worship in a meeting it is important to think carefully about your prayers. You are in a position to guide the way a congregation relates

---

<sup>52</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 65-66.



to God by your words, and Praying the Trinity will help them to relate to the Trinity.<sup>54</sup>

Likewise, the words we sing can clarify or obscure our understanding of and relationship with God:

All Christian songs need to be consistent with a Trinitarian syntax. . . . All languages have a syntax. . . . All languages have a syntax – a set of rules about how words do and do not fit together meaningfully in that language. . . . The Trinity functions in Christian God-Talk in such a basic and foundational way that it starts to function something like syntax – a set of rules about how Christian language works. . . . At the most basic level, no Christian songs should break the rules of the Trinitarian syntax. If they do, they end up becoming the Christian equivalent of gibberish.<sup>55</sup>

While not every text might name each Person of the Trinity, it is a worthy exercise to look at the sum of music selections and consider what they say about the faith we profess. Are we singing a Unitarian faith, a Binarian faith, or a Trinitarian faith?

Rienstra and Rienstra encourage the same exercise to discover what the lyrics of our sacred songs say about our relationship with one another. “On any Sunday, Christian worship fulfills its purpose best when it invites worshipers to interweave the ‘I’ of their individual devotion with the ‘we’ of the assembled people of God.”<sup>56</sup> Gerrick Immink agrees:

Participants in a worship service join a social community, so they must relate to each other. . . . In their expressions, worshippers must consider the community. The “I” of the liturgy is not an isolated individuality, but an “I” that is embedded in contact with others, an “I” that is constituent of the community. This is

---

<sup>54</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 120-121.

<sup>55</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 105-106.

<sup>56</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 54.

manifested in our congregational singing. The individual voice becomes part of the voice of the congregation.<sup>57</sup>

If we want to help people perceive the world not only as an embodied “I,” but also as an embodied “we,” we need to embed our “we” story in worship.

Consider what pronouns we use in worship and when we use them. For instance,

Perhaps *we* is the appropriate choice in songs sung near the beginning and end of the service. At the beginning of the service, we need to be reminded that we are coming together in worship. We may have thought of ourselves as individuals in the parking lot, but now we are a congregation. If not, we might as well have stayed home and prayed on our knees in our bedrooms. Also, at the end of the service, we need reminding that we go out into the world not as individuals, on our own, but as part of a dispersed body.<sup>58</sup>

A right understanding of how we see and relate to those inside the church’s walls informs how we see and relate to those outside its walls. Indeed, a right understanding of ourselves as the body of Christ is itself a witness: “. . . the church, just by virtue of *being* the church, bears witness to life in the kingdom for all to see and experience. . . . Simply *being* the church provides an alternative to a broken world. In this light we preach that the church itself is mission.”<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> F. Gerrick Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred: The Practice, Theology, and Tradition of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 9.

## Relevance

How does worship relate to me and/or to our culture? This is the question of relevance. Again, there is significant debate about why and to what degree we are to make worship relevant to our culture.

Can we create relevance? According to Schmit, “The relevance of worship is not something that pastors, preachers, or worship leaders can build into the experience. They can only pray for it.”<sup>60</sup> While this author agrees that God is the enabler and initiator in both our worship and relationship with God, it seems there are some means by which we can build relevance into the experience of worship. As Schmit later indicates,

Preaching is contextual. The sermon . . . is designed for a particular time, place, and people . . . Accordingly, missional preaching will contend with congregational, as well as community issues and opportunities; regional, national, and global issues, whether religious, social, political, or related to weather and disasters; [and] cultural issues, especially those that compete with the faithful life of discipleship.<sup>61</sup>

To contend with these issues, we have to craft a message that is relevant to them.

“Yes, but we can go too far,” Michael Horton might respond. “People today do not have a long attention span, we are told, and are impatient with sermons that are not relevant (often ‘relevant’ here means sermons that focus on us and our practical improvement rather than focusing on God and his works).”<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 181.

<sup>62</sup> Horton, *A Better Way*, 40.

Insomuch as people may grow impatient with “irrelevant” sermons, it has been observed that they can also grow weary of “relevant” gimmicks:

So many people hear the good news when it comes to Jesus’ saving work: It’s by grace, not by works. But the trouble comes when they discover how many gimmicks, techniques, methods, and means there are out there for climbing up to God and experiencing a vision of his glory, a touch of his power, a glimpse of his majesty. When they get burned out on this sort of religion, they will be ready either for atheism or the theology of the cross and resurrection.<sup>63</sup>

Should we be surprised that the fastest growing religious group is the “none’s” – no religious affiliation – when, in all our efforts to be relevant, we give people something that falls far short of what is truly relevant?

For Michael Frost, a congregation’s goal is a gauge of its relevance:

My concern is that we should allow church membership to be the outcome of Christian mission, not its goal. If we make the alerting of people to God’s rule the *primary* task, then church membership will be a *secondary* outcome. We need to learn to stop putting the cart before the horse. Whenever we assume church attendance is the chief end of mission, we will find ourselves reducing evangelism to recruitment and mission to salesmanship with all its attendant abuses.<sup>64</sup>

When the church’s aim in worship, through gimmicks, techniques, and methods, is to make members, not disciples, it not only falls short of being relevant to the culture; it falls short of being relevant to the *Kingdom*.

To help congregations avoid these potential shortcomings, Schmit distinguishes between “relating” to humanity and “pertaining” to context, as compared to being “relevant”:

---

<sup>63</sup> Horton, *A Better Way*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 65.

While worship must *pertain* to the human person and properly *relates* to the corporate as well as the individual context, it is not first about making people feel involved or moved or good about themselves. Worship is first about God and what God is doing as we join with the body of Christ and enter into his divine presence. The true relevance of worship is the understanding that *God chooses to relate to us*. If worship is relevant in that sense, the implication is that every service of worship can be a renewed setting in which the Creator comes into communion with human creatures.<sup>65</sup>

Mark Labberton concurs, urging, “We should be discerning about mimicking culture rather than truly entering into it. We tend to make relevance a value in and of itself, and that may or may not be right in light of the gospel.”<sup>66</sup> We may think the danger is being irrelevant, but, like Frost, Labberton contends there is a greater danger still: “Nothing could be more relevant than the God who made us and came to live among us in Jesus Christ. The real danger is not that we pursue relevance too much but too little: it’s too much about our culture and too little about God.”<sup>67</sup>

Can we go too far on this end of the spectrum – being too *little* about culture? Chapter One discussed how “culture is complex, subtle, and inescapable. . . . And if we are not deliberately thinking about our culture, we will simply be conformed to it without ever knowing it is happening.”<sup>68</sup> If we want to avoid becoming too much about culture, we have to deliberately think about culture.

---

<sup>65</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 50. Chan agrees, “The church does most for the world when it is least like the world, whereas the church that tries hard to be ‘relevant’ spells doom for itself and for the world.” Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 84.

<sup>67</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 50-51.

<sup>68</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 186.

Part of that “deliberate thinking” involves recognizing that worship has an unavoidable cultural context:

Some readers may deliberately recoil from the question, “How do we choose a worship form?” because they think it reflects an American consumer mentality that designs or chooses ministry simply to meet the felt needs of the customer. But while consumerism can indeed be the force behind such a questions, the assumptions behind resistance to the question can be just as suspect. . . . They wrongly assume their own version of Christianity is ahistorical rather than culturally or socially situated. Or they may avoid the question due to the strength of their own tastes. . . . But . . . all human expressions are to some extent culturally embodied, and this applies to worship as well. While the truths we confess and profess transcend culture, no articulation or embodiment of them can be culture transcending.<sup>69</sup>

Keller’s argument echoes that of Lesslie Newbigin. In considering the challenges of contextualization, Newbigin emphasized the overarching goal of making the gospel understood:

If the gospel is to be understood, . . . it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them. . . . How can the gospel “come alive” in all these different cultural contexts, and still be the same authentic gospel? That is the problem of contextualization. . . . But of course the truth is that every communication of the gospel is already culturally conditioned. The word “contextualization” seeks to avoid both these dangers and to direct attention to the need so to communicate the gospel that it speaks God’s word to the total context in which people are now living and in which they now have to make their decisions.<sup>70</sup>

That is Keller’s goal as well: to make the gospel not comfortable, but comprehensible.<sup>71</sup>

Keller’s distinction is critical. Neither he nor Newbigin seeks to promote relativism or consumerism, nor do they maintain that the church has to choose between

---

<sup>69</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 297.

<sup>70</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 141-142.

<sup>71</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 303.

the gospel *or* culture – it is about the gospel *and* culture. “It is a false dichotomy to insist we must choose between seeking to please God and being concerned with how unchurched people feel or what they might be thinking during our worship services.”<sup>72</sup> Drawing on Paul’s words to the church at Corinth, “I have become all things to all people, so that by any means I might save some” (I Corinthians 9:22), Keller states, “Paul is reminding us that in every culture there are many things that do not directly contradict Scripture and therefore are neither forbidden nor commanded. In charity and humility, such cultural features should generally be adopted to avoid making the gospel unnecessarily foreign.”<sup>73</sup>

According to Josh Moody and Robin Weekes, a primary means by which preachers can make the gospel comprehensible is through illustration:

Illustration is a key tool in engaging the imagination, as the preacher evokes mental images in the mind of the listener, especially to make concepts real. The preacher needs to establish the connection between the biblical concept and something we can readily identify with and understand to be true. The art of illustration is the art of incarnating biblical truths in the world in which the audience actually lives.<sup>74</sup>

Keller stresses the same point:

Preach in the vernacular. . . . As you prepare the sermon, imagine a particularly skeptical non-Christian sitting in the chair listening to you. Be sure to set the asides, the qualifiers, and the extra explanations that are necessary to communicate in a way that is comprehensible to them. Listen to everything in

---

<sup>72</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 302.

<sup>73</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 297.

<sup>74</sup> Josh Moody and Robin Weekes, *Burning Hearts: Preaching to the Affections* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2014), 57.

the worship service with the ears of someone who has doubts or struggles with belief.<sup>75</sup>

Note that Moody, Weekes, and Keller all address the imagination, for, like Smith, they understand “Christian formation is a conversion of the imagination”<sup>76</sup> that invites us to inhabit a story as natives:

You know you’ve become a native when you know what’s coming next, when you can anticipate the next move in social discourse because you are now acclimated to a “world” on a level that no longer requires conscious deliberation or processing. You now make sense of your world *with* others, but in a way you no longer notice because it’s become “natural” for you. You also act accordingly: since you are now primed to automatically perceive the world in habituated ways, you’re also inclined to act in certain ways because your perception of the world enables you to perceive what’s at stake, what’s required of you, what you’re called to – not because you’re thinking about relevant rules but because, as a “native” you now can’t imagine seeing the world otherwise. It will just seem that this is “the way things are,” and you will generally act accordingly.<sup>77</sup>

In order for a narrative, in this case, God’s Narrative, to become the orienting background of our being-in-the-world, it must become something we do naturally, that is, without thinking. Again from Smith, “It is not enough to convince our intellects; our imaginations need to be caught up – and caught up into – the story of God’s restorative, reconciling grace for all creation.”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 304. When I was in seminary, we were encouraged to consider, beyond the non-Christian, what would the single person, the divorced person, the young family, the addicted person, the homeless person, the widowed person, etc. be thinking listening to you preach?

<sup>76</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 157.



Keller expands our engagement of the imagination from preaching to all of worship.<sup>79</sup> Does our Call to Worship address the fact that it is *God* who calls, not we who call ourselves, to worship? If liturgy is the “work of the people,” does it express the *language* of the people?

The liturgy will indeed have a Christian doctrinal core, but if it merely expresses creedal correctness without reference to the context of the people and their calling to mission, then it becomes a kind of Gnosticism. . . .  
. . . But, rightly conducted and understood, liturgy is the point where the Christian faith of the last 2,000 years penetrates the lives of worshippers in ways that bring them into relevant discipleship. . . . Liturgy should never become a polished art form, so detached from life outside that even the most profound words of obedience, self-sacrifice, and discipleship can enter the ear or run off the tongue without apparently touching the heart, emotions or will. In both the *givenness* of received forms and the art of *relating* them to the present church and world, the fuel is there, ready to blaze when the fire of the Spirit ignites it. And, ideally, the liturgy of corporate worship will impact not only individual discipleship but also the corporate mission of the people as they gather in order to be sent out.<sup>80</sup>

Do our prayers incorporate the needs of our community, nation, and God’s world, as well as our needs and the needs of our church community?

Most importantly, is our worship gospel-centered? In the discussion of the gospel and culture in this section concerning relevance, not once have the authors suggested emphasizing the gospel *over* culture. Lesslie Newbigin raised questions about making the gospel “understood” and the “authentic” gospel “come alive.” Keller has emphasized making the gospel not comfortable, but comprehensible. There are some who might think that proclaiming the gospel – in preaching and in all of worship – might

---

<sup>79</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 297.

<sup>80</sup> John Corrie, ed., *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 211-212.

get too comfortable: “Christians will be bored by all of this.”<sup>81</sup> In truth, those looking for a lecture, rather than a “relevant” sermon (that is, by Horton’s definition, a sermon that focuses on us and our practical improvement rather than focusing on God and his work) might be bored.

In response to these objections, Keller maintains,

The one message that both believers and nonbelievers need to hear is that salvation and adoption are by grace alone. . . . The gospel of free, gracious justification and adoption is not just the way we enter the kingdom; it is also the way we grow into the likeness of Christ. . . .  
. . . Moralistic sermons will be applicable to one of the two groups - either Christians or non-Christians. But Christocentric preaching of the gospel grows believers and challenges non-believers.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, when we encounter the whole gospel, we find that it is not simplistic, but richly profound, for the gospel is the “offense and consolation...to believers and nonbelievers alike.”<sup>83</sup>

### Repetition

Related to relevance is repetition. Out of a desire to appeal to a culture that loves novelty, “we, especially we Protestants, have a built-in allergy to repetition in worship, though we are quite happy to affirm the value of repetition in almost every other sphere of life.”<sup>84</sup> Musicians repeat scales, and athletes repeat drills, for we know

---

<sup>81</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 305.

<sup>82</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 305-306.

<sup>83</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 307.

<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 181.

that “ritual is the way we (learn to) believe with our bodies”<sup>85</sup>: “We are being taught *how* to perceive the world when we are taught to sit up straight; we are learning how to constitute our social world when we’re trained to line up in single file; and when we are enjoined to kneel for confession, an entire cosmology is instilled in us.”<sup>86</sup> Rather than being averse to repetition, Smith contends, “A liturgical anthropology should engender a new appreciation for repetition,”<sup>87</sup> for the repetition of God’s Story develops natives of that Story. Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra share Smith’s appreciation for repetition:

Repetition is a way of remembering and carrying on our Christian story. We remember in order to be a countercultural witness. This is why God was always calling the ancient Israelites to remember: remember that you were slaves, remember that I rescued you, remember the law that protects you and sets you apart. The Israelites did much of their remembering through worship rituals – so do we.<sup>88</sup>

However, they also raise a potential concern: “Repetition is only meaningless *when we don’t mean it*.”<sup>89</sup>

Take, for instance, the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, or other words commonly repeated in services, words which worshipers – and worship leaders – may recite without reflecting on their meaning. A few years ago, when leading the Lord’s Prayer, I drew a blank and had to stop in the middle of the prayer. Rather than their continuing on with the prayer, the entire congregation also stopped. As I struggled to

---

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 93.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 95-96.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 181.

<sup>88</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 76.

<sup>89</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 83.

remember the next phrase, I realized the congregation probably shared in that struggle. We have learned the prayer as a whole unit, rather than also learning an appreciation of each individual word and phrase. I invited us to re-start the prayer from the beginning. That humbling experience taught me the importance of helping a congregation to understand the Lord's Prayer so that it moves from mere memorization to rich meaning. As Rienstra and Rienstra indicate, "The challenge is to *grow into* these words, to *learn* to mean them more and more every time we say them."<sup>90</sup>

Beyond the specific liturgical words that we regularly use, another helpful way to incorporate repetition is to "use appropriate words of Scripture at the same point in the service over many weeks."<sup>91</sup> This practice may be particularly appropriate during special seasons of the church year. For example, one Advent a congregation began each Sunday worship hour with a reading from Isaiah 40:3 – "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." – followed by the same choral call to worship. As early as the second week, these familiar words and notes seemed to mark for the congregation "the beginning of the hour of adoration, [and]...also the conclusion of the period of action."<sup>92</sup>

Finally, Rienstra and Rienstra encourage worship leaders to help a congregation focus on one thing at a time in order to allow "one focus" to become "second nature."<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 65.

<sup>92</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 161.

<sup>93</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 87.

For example, the worship leader might invite people to pay attention to specific words in a song. This practice may be especially helpful when singing a familiar song that, like the Lord's Prayer or Apostles' Creed, worshipers might be tempted to sing without much reflection. In a recent worship service, a worship leader introduced the song "Bless The Lord/10,000 Reasons" by reading Psalm 96:1: "O sing to the Lord a new song." Highlighting a phrase in the chorus – "Sing like never before, oh my soul" – the leader reminded the congregation that God calls us to sing, and deserves, a fresh song; today's praises – not yesterday's leftovers. I had sung this song hundreds of times, yet I had never really paused to reflect on that phrase and what it meant in terms of worshipping God for all God is worth in the present moment. By giving worshipers one focus, this worship leader provided a great example of "honoring what is familiar," while also honoring God's command "to do new things in worship."<sup>94</sup>

#### Release . . . or Rather . . .

Some worship leaders end worship by saying, "You are released," or "You are dismissed." Liturgical theologians might ask these colleagues, is this the most gospel-centered way to "end" worship? To what are we "releasing" worshipers?

Worship leaders have a responsibility to pay attention to every word we use. Preachers can sometimes give primary importance to the words of the sermon and less importance to the closing words of worship. These closing words, however, "have the potential to connect the hour of worship to the rest of the work we do as Christians in

---

<sup>94</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 189. The authors cite Psalm 96:1 as evidence of God's command.

our daily lives of witness and service”<sup>95</sup> - and not just to what we will do the next day or the next week, but even the next moment: “. . . the ‘end’ of worship, in terms of its *telos* and goal, is bound up with what [worshippers] will do next: head out the door into the world.”<sup>96</sup>

To connect worship with what happens next, the closing words have to be connected to *something*: they have to be connected – carefully, intentionally, *incarnationally* – to the Word that is the “one focus” or center of the service. Scripturally-based worship planning moves out from the center. Appealing to our aesthetic sense and love of metaphor, Schmit says, “If the Word and sacraments set the sails for God’s people, then the sending provides the promise of wind to fill them and move them inexorably.”<sup>97</sup>

Schmit’s description of the final words of a worship service is intentional, for worship does not have an *ending* – it has a *sending*. To say we are “released” or “dismissed” implies that worship has ended, when actually it has only just begun. “Wrongly construed, the moment of sending can give the sense that worship is a containable set of activities bracketed by a musical prelude and postlude, and complete within itself.”<sup>98</sup> On the contrary, worship is not containable. Indeed, it should be *uncontainable*, spilling over into what we do when we go out into the world.

---

<sup>95</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 27.

<sup>96</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Schmit, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 47.

Critical to this understanding of the importance of the closing words is our understanding of the relationship between worship and mission, as outlined in Chapter Two. If all of life is worship, and all of life is story, then the way we help worshipers connect the two is by connecting their story to God's Great Story – and demonstrating how this is also the world's story: "Worship and mission are the same: The way we live inside the church is to be identical to the way we live outside. The sending is the point of integration between the two."<sup>99</sup>

As noted earlier, a right understanding of how we see and relate to those inside the church's walls informs how we see and relate to those outside its walls. As Labberton exhorts, "Biblical worship that finds God will also find our neighbor."<sup>100</sup> To accomplish this goal, the Story we tell in worship needs to capture the imagination in a way that we bring the "not yet" dream of the future into the "already" realized present.<sup>101</sup>

The same Spirit who indwells the heavenly city now indwells his church and takes from what is God's and makes it ours (Rom. 8:26-27). Not only "previews of coming attractions" but the actual *dawn* of the new creation itself is what the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead brings through the ordinary ministry of Word and sacrament. What a difference it would make in our worship if people didn't simply think they were practicing for an eternity they don't have any use for anyway but rather tasting the food on the table of a world feast that never winds down.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Bradley also addresses the importance of taking the already (our memory) into the not yet. Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 5.

<sup>102</sup> Horton, *Better Way*, 140. Compare Horton's description to Michael Frost's use of the same metaphor. Frost says film previews, or trailers, are "a great metaphor for the missional church. If it does its job well, people will see what it does and say, 'I want to see the world they come from.' Far from being a cute illustration, this is at the very core of Christian mission. The church is to be like a trailer for the New

“What a difference it would make in our worship” – and what a difference it would make in our world – if we had this way of being in the world.

For Smith, the key to enacting this “kingdom come” being-in-the-world in the meantime of the “not yet”<sup>103</sup> is found in the closing words of worship. In his chapter appropriately titled “Restor(y)ing the World,” Smith writes,

To emphasize the s/ending of Christian worship is not to reduce worship to moral formation or to treat the presence of God as a tool for our self-improvement. Rather, the centrifugal *end* of Christian worship is integral to the Story we rehearse in Christian worship; sending is internal to the logic of the practice. To emphasize that Christian action is the end or *telos* of Christian worship is not to instrumentalize worship but is rather to “get” the Story that is enacted in the drama of worship – the “true story of the whole world” in which we are called to play our part as God’s image-bearers *by* cultivating creation.<sup>104</sup>

When we communicate the Story in this manner, the s/ending becomes, not a release from worship, but a release into the world to worship – to continue God’s Story.

There is yet another important component of the closing words. We need a reminder that we do not go out into the world as individuals, but as a part of a “dispersed body.”<sup>105</sup> We need assurance that the Triune God himself goes with us. If worship were “merely time with a deistic god who winds us up and then sends us out on

---

Jerusalem, a taster, with all the best bits on full display” (Frost, *Road to Missional*, 29). While their messages are similar, it appears Frost sees the vision as still part of the “not yet,” which it is. But Horton seems to suggest it is actually closer to the “already” than we think.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 166.

<sup>104</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153-154.

<sup>105</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 53.



our own...as self-sufficient actors,”<sup>106</sup> then the hour of worship would be anything but sabbath rest – or, for that matter, anything different from the rest of our hours.

The world’s story tells us we are on our own; we have to look out for ourselves. Yet we have been set free from this slavery to self and set free to worship. The way we mark the hour of worship as different from all other hours is by telling this different Story.

God does not send us out on our own. As Jesus said in his commission, “I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).<sup>107</sup> Similarly, in Luke 10, Jesus reminds us that we do not go alone; we go in community with one another (Luke 10:1). Through the charge and the benediction, the wise preacher reminds worshipers of both relationships.

In this sense, the sending moves from the “least important words” to perhaps the most important, for, when the sending is combined with God’s promise, it is a “powerful liturgical moment”:

To see the sending as a powerful liturgical moment means that it is prepared intentionally and conducted with vitality. It is not an afterthought nor a casual “see ya later,” but a force-filled word of compulsion. It contains a sense of the impending action that is ahead, and it is grounded in the sense that God is present in the world of action even as in the place of adoration. We are sent forth, not on our own, to make the best of the coming days, but with God. We are blessed, benedicted; we are infused with the conviction that God is with us in the journey from interior activities (of centering) to exterior activities (of serving), that God’s Spirit is leading us from adoration to action, and that Christ’s love in its embrace has redeemed the body of Christ and in its outward reaching will continue his mission of healing, peace, justice, and salvation in the world. A

---

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153.

<sup>107</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Numbered ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 1375.

strong sending will bless God's people on their way but will also propel us insistently into the world of living discipleship.<sup>108</sup>

We are released, not *from* worship, but *to* worship. We are released, not as *individuals*, but as Jesus' *body*, with the assurance that he is Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus, who became incarnate in our story, now sends us out to continue incarnating his Story.

### **Toward More Imaginative Worship**

In conclusion, let us briefly focus on the imagination of the worship leader, for, as much as worshipers' imagination needs "to be caught by – and caught up into – the Story of God's restorative, reconciling grace for all of creation,<sup>109</sup> so does ours. "We have rarely been challenged toward more imaginative worship. Our obsession with what "works" has lulled us into imitating perceived success while sacrificing creativity in the process. We are actually starved for the imagination of God, but we are unaware of our hunger."<sup>110</sup> May we not settle for the limits of our imagination, but may we hunger for the One "who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). Indeed, his imagination is more immense than the sea.

---

<sup>108</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 52.

<sup>109</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 157.

<sup>110</sup> Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 41.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PROJECT: “WORTH-SHIP: ALL WE’RE WORTH FOR ALL GOD’S WORTH”**

Thus far, this thesis-project has explored why worship is the hour that is different from all other hours. In order for worship to be this different hour, to be the action that is different from all other actions and that thereby leads to a different action in response, we must reclaim the biblical understanding of God’s Story and the call to tell that Story in worship. Further, *all* of worship needs to be caught up in the rhythm of God’s Story – the nature of God’s Story, the method we use to tell God’s Story, how God’s Story connects with worshipers’ stories, and how we are commissioned to continue God’s Story.

To support this thesis, I developed a five-week liturgical and homiletic series entitled “Worth-ship: All We’re Worth for All God’s Worth.” In order to evaluate the series based on worshipers’ experience, I invited leaders and other members of our congregation to complete a weekly reflection survey. The following describes the context of our congregation, an overview of each week of the series, and a description of the survey conducted.

### **Congregational Context**

Originally organized in 1875, Lithonia Presbyterian Church was dissolved in 1881 and then reorganized in 1891. After a history of pastoral calls lasting fewer than five years, and a few longer-term ones, our congregation is now midway through its twelfth decade and worshipping in its third location. The first move came in 1978, when, in order

to expand its property, the congregation relocated to an address two miles south of the original building. In 2000, a megachurch was founded across the street from that property, and, when a private school made an unsolicited offer to purchase the church's property a few months later, the congregation relocated to a property in the City of Conyers fourteen miles north, in a community where there was no other church within five miles and, with this move, renamed itself Presbyterian Church of the Resurrection (PCR). As I affirmed the congregation in my inaugural sermon as their interim pastor, "Why be a church where there already is a church? Why not go to a new place that needs someone to be a witness to Jesus Christ and to what it means to love God and God's people?"

The congregation's statistical history is similar to other mainline congregations, as described in Chapter One. With a current membership of 125 and average worship attendance of 60, PCR has experienced roughly a 14 percent decrease in membership in the past decade and a 25 percent decrease in worship attendance in the past three years.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this noticeable decline, PCR has a commitment to the church family. In a recent Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) survey conducted by Holy Cow! Consulting,<sup>2</sup> the congregation was described as a "Hearth and Home" culture. The consulting firm defines such a congregation as "conservative" in its theological and

---

<sup>1</sup> "Statistical Snapshot for Presbyterian Church of the Resurrection," Presbyterian Mission Agency, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/22145/>. Part of this worship attendance decrease is common in relationship to an installed pastoral transition.

<sup>2</sup> From Holy Cow! Consulting's Vital Signs Resources report for our congregation. Survey conducted in September 2016. Results reported in October 2016.

political views and “settled” in its response to change. The congregation sees itself as a spiritual family - and, for most members, it is also a biological family. Many members, born and raised in the congregation, continue to be involved, no matter where the building is located or to where that member moves. The survey revealed that 84 percent of those who completed the survey live ten or more miles from the current property, with some driving as much as an hour, passing several other Presbyterian congregations on the way.

In addition to the geographic separation of the congregation and its hosting community, there is a demographic difference. The congregation’s membership is 94 percent Caucasian, while the county is significantly more racially diverse. The average household income of the congregation is \$110,000,<sup>3</sup> almost double the average household income of the county.<sup>4</sup> A Title I elementary school resides less than two miles from the church campus.

Even with these many differences, PCR maintains a strong commitment to reach out to its community and make a Kingdom difference through projects with the elementary school and most notably through a food pantry on the church campus. The same CAT survey revealed the following strengths and desires of the congregation: The spirit of the congregation leads people to “want to get as involved as possible,” and the congregation does “a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called

---

<sup>3</sup> Based on those who completed the survey.

<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, Rockdale County, Georgia, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/RHI305210/13247>

to ministry.” The top priorities are to develop and implement a “strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church” and to “work to renew and revitalize the community around the church by building coalitions and partners that share this vision and commitment.”

Although survey respondents purport that the congregation helps people understand their call to ministry and has a desire to reach and renew its community, when compared with other congregations, those surveyed ranked low in terms of “connecting their faith to other aspects of life.” This missional pulse and spiritual connection are especially critical to “Hearth and Home” congregations, for, “If they lose their missional focus they may retreat into a fortress mentality and find themselves becoming a diminishing, aging congregation.”<sup>5</sup>

While worship, when rightly centered on God’s Story, creates a missional pulse for any congregation, this liturgical connection is particularly critical in a context where, due to the distance most members live from the campus, the only weekly large-group gathering is Sunday worship. This series conveys God’s Story with the purpose of helping the congregation “connect their faith to other aspects of life” by understanding its call to be the body of Christ in both its church community and home communities.

---

<sup>5</sup> Vital Signs Resources, Holy Cow! Consulting.

## Worship Series Project

### Overview

The “Worth-Ship: All We’re Worth for All God’s Worth” worship series aimed to communicate God’s Story with a focus on God’s three calls: the call to Christ, the call to community in Christ, and the call to the mission of Christ. In order to enable the congregation to see the liturgical hour as both the hour that is different from all other hours and the hour that makes a difference in all other hours, each week in this series highlights a particular aspect of God’s Story told in worship. Agreeing with Tim Keller’s premise that “all biblical doctrine is necessary background for understanding the Gospel,”<sup>6</sup> I centered each liturgy on one Old Testament text and one New Testament text, intentionally choosing some familiar and less familiar passages. The weekly themes and Scriptures are outlined in Appendix A.

To set apart this hour from all other hours, I deliberately focused on the beginning and ending of each liturgy. Recall the insights of Clayton Schmit and James Smith from Chapter Three. Schmit notes, “While the gathering is the beginning of the hour of adoration, it is also the conclusion of the period of action.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the “ending” of worship marks the move from the hour of adoration to the hour of adoration through action when it is ordered as a “sending”:

The centrifugal *end* of Christian worship is integral to the Story we rehearse in Christian worship; sending is internal to the logic of the practice. To emphasize that Christian action is the end or *telos* of Christian worship is not to

---

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 161.

instrumentalize worship but rather to “get” the Story that is enacted in the drama of worship – the “true story of the whole world” in which we are called to play our part as God’s image-bearers *by* cultivating creation.<sup>8</sup>

Together the call to worship and the s/ending frame the hour of worship and distinguish it from all other hours. Helping the congregation to hear God’s calling to adoration and to experience God’s sending back out to (renewed) activity shaped the liturgical design and choices.

The Call to Worship was a passage from the Psalms - the “hymnbook” of our faith. In this congregation’s tradition, worship ends with a closing hymn, a “charge,”<sup>9</sup> and a pastoral blessing followed by a sung “benediction response.”

The following is a brief summary of each of the five weeks of the series. The full orders of worship are outlined in Appendix B. The full sermon outlines, hymn introductions, charges, and benedictions are found in Appendix C.

### Week One: “It’s Story Time!”

How many of us remember story time during our nursery, Preschool, or elementary school days? The teacher would spread out a blanket, maybe add some cuddly stuffed animals, and invite you to gather around and find a seat together on the blanket while he or she read a story. Story time was a special time because, even if just for a few minutes, you forgot about how you got picked last for kickball at recess that morning or how your mom or dad didn’t cut off the crust of your PB&J sandwich (again). Story time took you to another world, where you could get lost in its fantasy.

---

<sup>8</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 153-154.

<sup>9</sup> While I had not worshipped with the congregation prior to my call as the interim pastor and thus have not experienced firsthand the liturgy of past “charges,” the comments I have heard – “that’s my favorite part, as it always makes me feel good and reassures me” – suggest the “charge” was more of a blessing than a robust sending.



Worship is just like that story time – only this story isn’t fantasy; it’s as real as it gets.

These words formed the opening of the initial sermon of the series. The theme of the first week was an introduction to worship as the telling of God’s story and our being restor(y)ed in order to restor(y).<sup>10</sup> As I preached these words, I spread out a quilt in the center aisle. I then continued to walk the length of the aisle so that I was in close proximity with the worshipers and was able to look people in the eye as I invited them to consider the importance of story time as a child and how God invites us into that same special story time as God’s children in worship.

The liturgy was built around Psalm 100 and Ephesians 1:3-14. These texts call us into doxology, that is, praise. As the focus of the week was an overview of worship, this doxology provided a good launching point, in accordance with Robin Parry’s insights cited in Chapter Two: “If we are to have a Christian understanding of what it is that is happening when we worship . . . the place to begin is with the ancient Christian doxology.”<sup>11</sup>

Both passages invite us into what Christopher Wright calls “missional praise.”<sup>12</sup> Psalm 100 centers the knowledge that God made Israel and that Israel is God’s people (v. 3) between two calls to worship, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth...” (v. 1) and “Enter his gates with thanksgiving” (v. 4). This bracketing of our creation with an

---

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 247.

invitation to worship tells us the purpose of our creation. Similarly, Paul summarizes God's Story in one long, breathless sentence spanning twelve verses with the constant refrain of how we are called to be "for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12).

The order of worship itself also called us into doxology. Psalm 100 is the basis of many worship songs, including the traditional "Old Hundredth" tune of the doxology. On this particular week, we intentionally chose to sing the words of doxology to an alternate tune (sung right before the Scripture readings), as the hymn following the proclamation of the Word, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," is also set to the "Old Hundredth." In doing so, we bracketed our listening for God's Word with doxology, just as Psalm 100 brackets us.

The sermon focused on how our fourfold order of worship tells the fourfold order of God's Story: Creation/Call To Worship – how God designed the world to be; Fall/Confession – how we are separated from God; Redemption/Hearing and Responding to the Word - how God brought us back into right relationship with him through Jesus Christ; and, Restoration – how the world will be again one day.

After walking briefly through the first three parts, I highlighted Restoration in order to introduce the relationship between worship and mission. I asked the congregation where we proclaim that part of the Story in worship. Certainly, we pray for restoration during the pastoral prayer. However, the way we most proclaim God's Restoration is in the part of the service where we prepare for "Going Out to be a Part of God's Word in the World." I encouraged us to pay special attention to that part of the service over the next few weeks, as it involves some of the most important words of

worship. For example, that hour we sang “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations” as a reminder that God’s Story does not conclude at the end of worship – God sends us out to *continue* the Story.

In addition to summarizing God’s Story and its relationship to worship, this first Sunday of the series laid the foundation for the remaining four weeks. Over the course of those weeks, we considered in much greater detail different parts of God’s Story as told in worship.

#### Week Two: “Ready, Set, Stop: Pausing the story to be ReStor(y)ed”

As we turned to the first part of God’s Story, Creation and our Call to Worship, we explored what it means to “be still” and to honor the Sabbath. In our responsive Call to Worship from Psalm 46, we heard God’s invitation to be still and know that God is God (v. 10). Afterward, our opening hymn reminded us of why we can be still and rest in God: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” These themes of our stillness and God’s strength threaded throughout the liturgical hour.

In describing why we take time to gather around the Word through our “Preparing our Hearts” private prayer, Call to Worship, and opening hymn, I compared it to a car that attempts to go from ninety miles per hour to a full stop. Depending on what has been going on in our lives that week, it can take time to transition from the hour of activity to the hour of adoration. I also invited the congregation to consider why we enter into the hour of adoration. Are we looking for something to make us feel good or to give us direction in life? I then encouraged us to consider James Smith’s question:

“I can’t answer the question, ‘What am I to do’ unless I have already answered a *prior* question, ‘Of which story am I a part?’”<sup>13</sup> That’s why we gather for worship each week. To borrow Smith’s words, after a full week of activity, we don’t just need to be restored; we need to be “restor(y)ed.”

The Word of God around which we gathered that morning was taken from Genesis 2:1-3 and Matthew 11:25-30. When God called us into being, that is, into God’s Story, God set apart the seventh day of the week to be holy because God rested from the work of creation on that day. That rest did not mean that God took a break from being God. He is still actively at work creating and re-creating. If God were not, if God were just here to top us off during worship and send us out into the world to go it alone with a “Good luck out there,”<sup>14</sup> this hour would be anything but restful. When we remember that Scripture points to God as our Creator, the One who keeps us and neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4), we can truly be still and rest.

In the same way that God’s rest was not a rest of inactivity, the rest to which Jesus calls us is not a break from the cares of the world. Instead, Jesus invites us to rest in his care and to partner with him in his care of the world.

When Jesus told the disciples to come to him and find rest for their souls, he said, “Take my yoke upon you” (Matthew 11:29). A yoke is a work tool designed to bond together two parties to carry some burden or labor together. How is taking on a yoke *restful*?

---

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153.

The descriptors of the yoke give us insight about the kind of rest – true rest – to which Jesus calls us. The yoke is “his,” not because he imposes it on us, but because he wears it with us. An easy yoke, or kind yoke, as some translations read, is one designed to conform perfectly to the shoulders of the one who wears it so that it is “kind” on the shoulders.<sup>15</sup> By wearing with Jesus the yoke that is designed to conform to his likeness, we are transformed more into his image, the image in which we were created. Therefore, we can rest from having to create an image for ourselves. In sum, we can let go of the stories of the world and allow Jesus to restor(y) us with his Story.

To prepare us to carry God’s Story into the stories of the world, we chose “God of Grace and God of Glory.” In discussing the series with our Worship Committee, I learned that the congregation did not often readily grasp why certain hymns were selected and how they connected with the Scripture. Throughout the series, we looked for ways to help worshipers make these connections. For example, when introducing “God of Grace and God of Glory,” I encouraged people to think about the words as we sang, as the text is both terrifying and reassuring. If we need to ask for God’s wisdom and courage for the facing of the next hour, what in the world are we about to face? Who knows? God knows.

In the charge and benediction that followed the hymn, I reminded us that we do not face the hour alone. We have a yoke-mate, and his name is Jesus. He will grant us wisdom and courage and everything we need as we go out from this hour to the next hour, bearing his image for all the world to see.

---

<sup>15</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 129.

### Week Three: “There Is No ‘I’ in Church: How God’s Story is Our Story”

Especially for a congregation where the church building and the church people are not in the same geographic community, I discerned the importance of conveying how God’s Story is not an individual Story – it is our corporate Story. As outlined in Chapter Three, Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra encourage worship leaders to consider the pronouns used in worship.<sup>16</sup> In addition to pronouns, I invited the congregation to consider nouns and verbs in worship that week: “Think about the last time you used the word ‘church’ in a sentence. What did your use of the word say about the meaning of ‘church’? Perhaps you said to your family earlier this morning, ‘Come on, it’s time to go to church.’ What does the way we use the word ‘church’ say about what we believe about the church?” As we prepared to hear God’s Word from Genesis 12:1-4 and I Peter 2:4-12, I asked us to listen for the first imperative verb in each passage, as these verbs capture the essence of what it means to be the church.

To remind us of what we had discovered so far about worship, I revisited the Old Testament text from the previous week. In Genesis 1-2, we hear the first call of God, when God called the world into being and called the first humans into existence. In our text that morning from Genesis 12, we hear God’s second call, the call to be an alternate community.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 53.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 117-118.

Peter also called us to be a community. Each of the metaphors he used were communal. You cannot build a house with just a cornerstone and one other stone – that would be a pretty lousy house. Similarly, God does not call us to be God’s *person*, but God’s *people* – because following Jesus is too important to do it alone.<sup>18</sup> Just as the image of God in which we are created is a relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so relationship is integral to what it means to bear the image of God. Consider the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience (Galatians 5:22-23). We can say we are a loving or patient person, but the real evidence is seen in our relationships. It is only in relationship that we are able to work out and bear the fruit of the image of God.

And it is work! We refer to the words and acts of worship as liturgy. Liturgy means “the work of the people.” The term is appropriate, for it takes work to hear God’s call to worship. It takes work to come to worship with our individual stories and leave with a deeper understanding that this is *our* Story. Finally, it takes work to realize it is not just about coming with my story and leaving with our Story, but to *come* with my story, to leave with our Story, and then *go* to continue God’s Story.

The two imperative verbs in our Scripture texts communicate the flow of this movement – “Come” (I Peter 2:4) and “Go” (Genesis 12:1). When we say, “Come to church,” it may communicate that church is just a building. But as Peter tells us, the church is not a building. It is a people. It is us.

There is something else telling about that phrase. We often tell people to “come to church,” as if we believe the *Field of Dreams* mantra, “If you build it, they will come.”

---

<sup>18</sup> From the foundational documents of The Fellowship Community.

Most people today do not just come and show up at the church doors one day. In order to help people see who the church is, we have to discover our call to *go* – or rather, *re-*discover it, for it has always been our calling.

Throughout Scripture, the times when we read the verb “Come” are in reference to Jesus. Jesus told the disciples, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens” (Matthew 11:28, the text from the previous week). In the text for this week, Peter wrote, “Come to him, a living stone” (1 Peter 2:4). However, when it comes to us and other people, Scripture uses the verb, “Go.” “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). In the words of the Old Testament text for this week, “Go from your country and your kindred to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

Abram’s call was not a call to an individual or even a communal call just to God’s people Israel. If we, the church, inherited the titles of Old Testament Israel, as all of the metaphors Peter used are – a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) – we also inherited the purpose of Israel’s creation and redemption.<sup>19</sup> It is not just redemption for our sake; it is redemption for a purpose: “in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

The word “proclaim” implies a public declaration. Like a herald in a town square, we are called to let who we are spill out of our doors into our communities by the way we live, speak, and act. Israel was never permitted to live in a vacuum. Israel was always

---

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 250.



to live for, with, and among others.<sup>20</sup> That is the purpose the Church has inherited as well: to live for, with, and among others. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer from Chapter One, “The church is the only organization that doesn’t exist for itself.”<sup>21</sup>

From fast-food restaurants that advertise customers can “have it your way,” selfies that flood social media, and the i-prefix that defines every Apple product name, the world tells us to live as individuals. God calls us to an alternate worldview – to be an alternate community by the way we live as and with our community, for we is the Church. (The grammar here is intentional to communicate we are a singular body.)

In addition to the movement of the verbs in the Scripture texts, the movement of the pronouns in the sacred songs selected for worship conveyed God’s call to move from my story to our Story. The opening hymn, “Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above,” used first-person singular pronouns: “Thus, all *my* gladsome way along, *I* sing aloud thy praises. That all may hear the grateful song *my* voice unwearied raises” (v. 4, emphasis added). As worship progressed, we sang hymns that used more first-person *plural* pronouns, especially as we prepared to be sent out to be the Church in the world: “Let courage be our friend, Let wisdom be our guide, As we in mission magnify the Crucified! In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!” (“Come Sing, O Church, in Joy!,” v. 3)

Before the benediction, I invited us to consider how we tell our Story, not only by the words we sing, but also by the way we sing them. One of the regularly used “family

---

<sup>20</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), 382.

songs” of this congregation is “May the Road Rise to Meet You,” commonly sung as the benediction response. While it is a *benedicting* song, it is not a robust *sending* song. To give worshipers the opportunity to experience it as a sending, before the song I asked, “Won’t it be great when we meet again next Sunday and can share with one another the many opportunities Jesus gave us to be his Church this week?” While the congregation normally turns and faces one another as they sing this benediction, that week I encouraged us to turn and face the doors through which we would leave to go and be the church and extend an arm in the same direction as a means of commissioning one another to be a blessing until we meet again, knowing that God holds us in the palm of his hand.

#### Week Four: “Be Care-Full What You Pray For: Restor(y)ing our Prayer”

In Weeks Four and Five, we turned our focus more directly to God’s restoration of the world and our call to join in that act of worship. As a starting point for this conversation, the theme of the fourth week was prayer. Our order of worship includes a time for sharing concerns of the congregation, followed by the pastoral prayer. In worship that week, we especially exhorted worshipers to consider, not only our needs, but the needs of our community and God’s world.

The Old Testament center for the week came from I Kings 8:33-43. As our congregation typically uses the Revised Common Lectionary in worship, and as this passage does not appear in the lectionary cycle, it was an unfamiliar text to the congregation and admittedly one I myself had not studied in depth before this project.

The way the Spirit led me to select this text was through Christopher Wright's commentary on verse 43: "Do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel," prays Solomon. Wright states, "Here is the Abrahamic commission [from Week Three] translated into missional prayer. Solomon prays *for* the nations that they will pray *to* YHWH God, and prays *to* God that he will answer them for his name's sake."<sup>22</sup>

We offer prayers of intercession every week. But for whom do we pray? We tend to pray for our family and friends. Do we, like Solomon, pray with the same fervency, the same consistency, the same prayer that God would hear in heaven the voices of the foreigner? Not just geographic foreigners, but spiritual ones, those who do not know God, those for whom it is foreign to call on God's name? Do we offer prayers even for our *enemies*, those whose ways are foreign to all that we may believe to be true and right? Later, before the pastoral prayer, our choir encouraged us to pray to God to hear the prayers of all of God's children as they sang, "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying."

The New Testament center, Matthew 9:35-58, was more familiar to the congregation. This passage serves as "the only other time in the Gospels when Jesus told the disciples what to pray. And" - like Solomon's prayer - "it is unmistakably missional"<sup>23</sup>: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

---

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 255.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 258.

To challenge worshipers to hear this familiar prayer with new ears, I shared the provocative musing of Hugh Palmer, Rector of All Saints Church in London, England:

Why, asks Hugh Palmer, do we use the “our Father” prayer so regularly in Christian liturgy, and this “other Lord’s Prayer” so spasmodically? What might have been the story of Christian mission if *this* prayer had become the one we had memorized and repeated (and meant) down through the centuries? Of course, it’s a dangerous prayer to pray. It tends to become self-answering, as the disciples found.<sup>24</sup>

While I agree with N.T. Wright that the “our Father” is equally self-answering and, hence, equally dangerous, for every time we pray “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done,” “we are pleading for that day to be soon, and pledging ourselves to work to bring it closer,”<sup>25</sup> I used the “other Lord’s Prayer” and Palmer’s commentary to urge us to consider the content of *both* prayers, to use both prayers regularly, and “to *grow into* these words, to *learn* to mean them more and more every time we say them.”<sup>26</sup> For instance, the charge that morning was to find out what might have happened if this “other Lord’s Prayer” had become the one we memorized, prayed, and meant by praying Matthew 9:38 every day the coming week and seeing how Christ used that prayer to help us see the world with the same compassion Jesus has when he sees us (Matthew 9:36). Prior to this charge, when leading into the Lord’s Prayer during our

---

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 258.

<sup>25</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004), 210.

<sup>26</sup> Rienstra and Rienstra, *Worship Words*, 83.

pastoral prayer, I prayed, “Lord, we are bold to plead and pledge ourselves to this work.”<sup>27</sup>

While we used a less familiar prayer to challenge our understanding of a familiar prayer, we incorporated familiar songs – during an unusual season – to help us hear these songs in a new way. In our e-newsletter and on social media the week prior, we raised the question, “Why Christmas carols in October?” During worship, we explained that Christmas carols were probably the oldest of songs to us. In a few weeks, when Christmas music began to flood shopping malls and grocery stores, both those who were active in a congregation and those who were less active would subconsciously find themselves humming along.

We know the tune. But do we know the words? *Really* know them? Because ultimately, it is not about singing the song, but living it. Many people today do not know Christ has come. They have heard the Word became flesh at Christmas, but they have never *seen* the Word become flesh. But they could – if we were willing to make Jesus’ prayer our prayer and sing the songs of his coming with all the joy and freshness he deserves. By singing “Joy to the World!” and “Go, Tell It on the Mountain,” we responded to God’s Call to Worship from Psalm 96:1: “O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Several times in subsequent pastoral prayer times since this series, I have introduced the Lord’s Prayer in a similar fashion to remind us of what we are saying – and meaning – when we pray.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Wright calls Psalm 96 “one of the most richly missional songs in the whole Bible.” Wright, *Mission of God’s People*, 251.

## Week Five: “The Never-Ending Story: Restor(y)ing The World”

The final week of the series sought to bring together all of the weekly themes and to provide practical application. In my ministry with a previous congregation, we had facilitated a missional discipleship workshop where we identified particular people and places where Jesus was calling us to be a relational witness. In her evaluation, one participant responded, “So I have my three people and three places. Now what do I do?”

In relating this story to my current context, I acknowledged that many of us may feel the way this friend did. Over the past four weeks, we had read various Scriptures that describe our call to share God’s Story: “Live for the praise of his glory,” says Paul (Ephesians 1:12). “Take my yoke upon you,” commands Jesus (Matthew 11:29). “Proclaim Christ’s mighty acts,” declares Peter. “Make known his deeds among the peoples,” sings the Psalmist (Psalm 105:1, our Call to Worship that day.) Each of these passages offers a beautiful picture of living a life of worship. But now what do we do? What does it mean for our everyday lives?

It means we are called to be movie trailers.

A movie trailer gives a glimpse of the upcoming feature. It whets your appetite for the real thing. It shows you some of the funniest scenes, the most romantic moments, or the best special effects, depending on the movie. It provides just enough intrigue so you get a taste of the plot and want to know what happens next. If a movie trailer does its job, people in the theater will turn to one another and say, “I want to see that movie.”

As Michael Frost states, “This is a great metaphor for the missional church.”<sup>29</sup>

Our lives are to give people a taste of the greatest joy, the greatest laughter, the greatest hope that we experience in the Kingdom of Heaven. “If [the church] does its job, people will see what it does and say, ‘I want to see the world they come from.’”<sup>30</sup>

In a very real sense, Jesus sent the disciples to be previews of the coming attraction when he sent the disciples “ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go” (Luke 10:1). While the full pericope of Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 served as our New Testament text, the focus was one specific instruction: Leave your baggage behind (Luke 10:4).<sup>31</sup> Jesus’ command conveys important reasons why we are to take nothing with us. First, we often bring our own agenda, rather than submitting to God’s agenda. Moreover, when we carry nothing with us, we are dependent and vulnerable with one other. In this posture, we are better able to listen to our neighbor, get to know our neighbor, and give and receive love – a critical component of ministry, for ministry moves at the speed of relationship.

Jesus’ instructions also speak to the speed of ministry: “Remain....do not move...”

Often results do not happen at the speed at which we and our fast-paced culture might

---

<sup>29</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Frost, *Road to Missional*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> While the prior week we had read Matthew 9:35-38, and while Matthew 10:5-23 relates this same account of Jesus with the disciples, I chose the Lukan account, for Luke tells, not only the remarkable acts that will take place when the disciples are sent out, but also the remarkable act that happens when they return.

like. But the good news is it is not about results. Whether people accept or reject us, our message is the same: “The Kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:9, 12).

Since the first week of the series explored the relationship between worship and mission, we revisited this relationship in the final week. In considering what it means to be sent out from worship to love our neighbor, I referenced Mark Labberton’s *The Dangerous Act of Worship*, observing that the book title alone says something about our worship. As noted in Chapter Three, Labberton asserts, “Biblical worship that finds God will also find our neighbor.”<sup>32</sup>

This insight is nothing new for us as followers of Jesus, for Jesus said the same. When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. *And a second is like it,*” he says, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-38, emphasis added). If worship involves showing our love for God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and if the second is like it, then worship also means showing our love for our neighbor.

That is exactly what Isaiah discovered in Isaiah 6:1-8. As the first week described God’s fourfold Story as told in the fourfold order of worship, we reviewed this fourfold Story as told in the calling of Isaiah. We often ask, “How do I hear God’s call?” How did Isaiah hear God’s call? He heard it in worship.

---

<sup>32</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21.



The scene in Isaiah 6 may sound like a supernatural vision, but it is actually a traditional worship service,<sup>33</sup> not unlike those we have each week. Isaiah is in God's Temple when he hears the seraphs calling to God and worshiping him: "Holy, holy, holy!" (v. 3 and our opening hymn). In view of God's holiness, Isaiah recognizes his *unholiness* and offers a Prayer of Confession: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips" (v. 5). After acknowledging his sin, he hears the Assurance of God's Grace: "Your guilt has departed," God says (v. 7). In response to God's grace, when he hears – or rather, *overhears*<sup>34</sup> – God's question to the angels, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah cannot help but interrupt and say, "Here am I! Send me!" (v. 8 and our closing hymn).

Was it a risky response? Certainly. If we keep reading in Isaiah 6, we find Isaiah's call was no walk in the park. There is risk anytime we say, "Here am I; send me." The risk is, what if God actually *does* send me?

It is dangerous to worship. Nevertheless, as any risk manager would tell us, if the potential gain is greater, you take the risk – and the potential gain could not be any greater than it is right now.

The disciples discovered that Kingdom gain when they returned. As they described to Jesus all the acts they had done, Jesus responded, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning" (Luke 10:19). Jesus had not told them to go and engage in spiritual warfare. He told them to go about living their lives, being with and among

---

<sup>33</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 54.

<sup>34</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 54.

people. Yet, somehow, in all that natural, everyday living as Jesus' disciples, something supernatural was happening.

As a means of making the gospel comprehensible, Tim Keller encourages worship leaders to “celebrate deeds of mercy and justice,” as “the deeds of the church will be far more important than our words in gaining plausibility.”<sup>35</sup> To help people consider how they can continue God's Story in the world, I highlighted recent examples from our congregation: Every time we bring forward to the communion table food for our food pantry, Jesus sees Satan fall. Every time we share Jesus' love by serving the local elementary school community, Jesus sees Satan fall. Every time the choir sings to God's glory, Jesus sees Satan fall. Every time we offer someone something as simple as a cup of water in Jesus' name, Scripture says (Matthew 10:42), Jesus sees Satan fall. Every time we pray with a “Here am I; send me!” openness to being the answer to our prayer, do we know what Jesus sees?

As part of the charge, I challenged us to ask ourselves at the end of each day that week, “When did Jesus see Satan fall today?” and then to list the answers Jesus brought to mind. Do not focus on big acts only, but pay special attention to the small acts. Our acts of mercy and justice do not have to be anything seemingly earth-shattering. Every time we risk being the restorative change God longs to see in the world, it is more than earth-shattering – it's *Kingdom*-inbreaking.

---

<sup>35</sup> Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 304-305.

It is easy to rejoice when we see results and just as easy to get discouraged when we do not. On those days, when we have a hard time listing ways we have seen God at work, Jesus assures us that there is another list already written for us. The disciples returned with exciting reports, and Jesus joined in their joy. “Nevertheless,” he also reminded them of their true joy, “do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice in that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). We rejoice in great things; Jesus rejoices in the greater thing.

God offers us that same assurance with every benediction when God sends us out from the hour of adoration to continue his Story in the world: God is with us, rejoicing over us as we go. To remind us of God’s sending and joyful presence with us, we commissioned one another using the benediction of Presbyterian pastor and former chaplain to the U.S. Senate Richard Halverson:

You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you there. Wherever you are, God has put you there. He has a purpose in your being there. Christ, who dwells in you, has something he wants to do through you wherever you are. Believe this, and go in his grace and love and power. Amen!

### **Worship Reflection**

To gauge the effectiveness of our telling God’s Story in worship, I invited a group of worshipers to complete a weekly reflection survey and a culminating survey. Those asked to participate included PCR’s ruling elders, the spiritual leaders of the congregation, and other members who seemed active and engaged in worship. I refrained from asking members of our Worship Committee to participate. Because they

are directly involved with worship, I felt it would be helpful for them to receive feedback from those not as directly involved.

As noted in the overview, there were three primary focal points of the worship series:

1. How all of worship is centered around the Story as told in the biblical texts of the day;
2. How worship marks the beginning of the hour of adoration and the end of the period of action;
3. How worship has a sending, rather than an ending.

To determine how effective these foci were addressed, respondents were asked about their experience of Gathering Around the Word: “What did you hear in the opening part of worship? What was most helpful in encouraging you to pause from the week’s activity and enter into the hour of worship?” In reflecting on the time of Listening for God’s Word, worshipers were asked, first, to summarize in two or three sentence what they heard in the Scripture and sermon and, second, to summarize in one sentence the theme of the Scripture and sermon. Finally, respondents were invited to consider their experience of Going Out to be a Part of God’s World: “What did you hear in the closing part of worship? What was most helpful in making clear that Christ has called you to do something in response to God’s Word and to assure you that God goes with you as you join in God’s mission the coming week? What do you feel called to do in response to worship?” Copies of the weekly reflection and concluding reflection may be found in Appendix D.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SO . . . WHAT IS SO DIFFERENT?

This thesis-project began with the question asked on the night of the Passover Seder, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” It is different because that night recites the story of God’s deliverance. In Chapter One, I proposed that the same question could be asked of corporate Christian worship on any Lord’s Day, “Why is this hour different from all other hours?” In the chapters that followed, I argued that the telling of God’s Story makes the liturgical hour different from all other liturgical hours and ignites a difference in all other vocational hours.

Theoretical study aside, we still must ask the practical, experiential question, *is* the hour different from all other hours? While we as worship leaders may grasp intellectually the difference of the liturgical hour, we have also been called to *enact* that difference in the way we order and lead worship. To test if and how the hour was different during the “Worth-Ship: All We’re Worth for All God’s Worth” series, selected members of the Presbyterian Church of the Resurrection, Conyers, Georgia, were asked to complete weekly reflections. Based on the outcome of the project and the evidence of these surveys, I assert that the worship hour *can* be different when we emphasize its distinctions. To support this thesis, I explore some of the key distinctions of worship and the difference this research may render on my own liturgical ministry, as well as the ministry of others. In doing so, I consider how much of this difference is measurable, not just by the questions asked, but also by the questions we have yet to ask. I conclude by examining how worship not only *can* be different, but *is* different.

## It *Can* Be Different . . . When We Are Out of Our Minds

In Chapter One, I related a conversation with a friend who, when she asked me to join her in an event on Sunday and I declined, said, “Oh, right, you have that other presentation (worship) and workshop (adult discipleship hour).” This encounter revealed how the culture “gets” the importance of the church event, even if not necessarily the gospel message, for it appreciates the appeal of our loves. Further, it suggests how the culture views the church event.

When we attend a “presentation” or “workshop,” we anticipate that an “expert” will enrich our lives by sharing his or her knowledge. While the church is no longer viewed as an “expert,” we often adopt the principle of “convincing the intellect.”<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the Word-centered Reformed Tradition, we place a high value on education. We may be tempted to arrange “the basic ‘mental furniture’ for understanding a gospel presentation.”<sup>2</sup> In the age of Christendom, this intellectualist “what I *do* is the outcome of what I *think*”<sup>3</sup> approach might have worked. However, as James K.A. Smith reminds us, in order for *worship* to work, we need to remember that we are actors before we are thinkers: “We aren’t just educating spectators or observers; we are educating *actors* (emphasis added).”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 126.

For actors, “The relevant sort of ‘knowing’ here is not propositional knowledge, but rather an *aesthetic know-how*.”<sup>5</sup> *In this light, the hour of worship can be different when it imparts not just a know-why, but a know-how.*

Similarly, Josh Moody and Robin Weekes urge preachers to move beyond articulating mental concepts to evoking “mental images”: “It’s not enough in preaching just to get the text right. We must then go to the next step and ask, ‘In what way do the truths of this text raise my affections?’”<sup>6</sup> While the thesis-project surveys did not explicitly ask about the affections, most of the responses implicitly addressed the liturgy’s “aesthetic know-how.”<sup>7</sup> When asked what they heard in the Scripture and sermon or later in the charge and benediction, rarely did someone cite a theory. Rather, most cited how an illustration incarnated biblical truth.<sup>8</sup> For instance, some commented on how the visual of spreading a children’s blanket in the aisle conveyed to them how worship is “a great Story time.”<sup>9</sup> In reflecting on the final week of the series, many

---

<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Josh Moody and Robin Weekes, *Burning Hearts: Preaching to the Affections* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2014), 60.

<sup>7</sup> The fact that the respondents mentioned their affections without prompting affirms Smith’s belief in our “penchant for storied formation.” Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Moody and Weekes, *Burning Hearts*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of worship as the “telling of God’s Story,” or even the language of “Story,” may not be where the average congregation is going to start in terms of understanding the difference of the liturgical hour. For this reason, the questions in the reflection surveys did not use this language. Rather, they used the more common language of the fourfold order of worship. In hindsight, after the first week of the series, I might have changed the wording of the remaining weekly reflection questions to incorporate the concept of Story. However, that change would have assumed that each survey participant was present in corporate worship that first week (not a requirement for participation.) Based on this learning, if I were to do this project in another context, I would first take time to teach people about how worship is God’s Story so that the concept and language became more familiar. I would encourage the same of any worship leader who wishes to explore with their congregation how worship tells God’s Story.

shared how Michael Frost's analogy of our call to be "movie trailers"<sup>10</sup> gave new insight to what it means to be God's Storytellers. When talking about "Restor(y)ing Our Prayer," I related a story about a congregation in Kenya that worships in the corridor of an HIV/AIDS hospital. A patient being transported to surgery (or even the morgue) may be wheeled right down the congregation's center aisle. This visual of a congregation literally standing in the gap between life and death gave some respondents a better understanding of what happens when we intercede for people, be it the gap between sickness and health, between conflict and reconciliation, or between any two competing values.

While the Holy Spirit spoke to worshipers through these illustrations shared in worship, the Spirit spoke to me through the visions worshipers shared in their reflections. When considering God's invitation to "enter his gates with thanksgiving" (Psalm 100:4), I drew a comparison to ancient walled cities, where the point of entry was a gate. Depending on whether one was traveling to or from the city, the gate meant either one was coming home or entering the adventure of a new land. For us as God's people, God's gates involve both. One responder remarked, "I'm visual. The picture in my mind of God's opening the gates and inviting me into his home was deeply meaningful."

I appreciated this person sharing this beautiful picture, as well as this person's reminding me that we have visual learners in worship. A visual learner myself, the

---

<sup>10</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 29.



insight itself was nothing new. However, her highlighting our shared learning style convicted me of my bias toward that style.

Tim Keller advises pastors to be aware of the temptation to create a service that inspires the preacher and a few others.<sup>11</sup> In reviewing the survey responses and my sermon outlines, I noticed I often raised questions to encourage worshipers to consider a new way of seeing through the lens of the gospel. For example, on the same Sunday when I told the story of the congregation that meets in a Kenyan hospital, I shared an insight from their priest Father Tom, who once said, “In life, it is not about what you do, but what you see, out of which you do.” The Scripture that day was Matthew 9:35-38: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 36). Borrowing from the popular WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) acronym, I posited, “What if instead we asked WWJS – What Would Jesus See? – and let that seeing lead to our doing?”

Do I seek to engage other learning styles with the same intentionality? Certainly, the spoken liturgy, proclamation, and music speak to aural worshipers. What about the other senses, however? Among the graces of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is how it engages all of the senses: we see and smell the elements, we hear the breaking of the bread and pouring of the cup, we touch the bread, tasting its texture and the juice’s sweetness. So once a month, in accordance with my congregation’s tradition, we invite all of our senses into the worship experience. Is that enough?

---

<sup>11</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 301.

James Smith might respond, “No.” While he would agree that a new way of seeing the world through the lens of God’s Story is vital because imagination leads to action,<sup>12</sup> there is more to embodying God’s Story than just our eyes. In response to his observation that our culture capitalizes on our penchant for storied formation, as evidenced by “Christian assimilation to consumerism, nationalism, and various stripes of egoisms,” Smith observes, “The devil has had all the best liturgies”<sup>13</sup> (Chapter One). The solution is to more fully embody and enact our true Story, God’s Story:

A proper response to this situation is to change our *practice* – to reactivate and renew those liturgies, rituals, and disciplines that intentionally embody the story of the gospel and enact a vision of the coming kingdom of God in such a way that they’ll seep into our bones and become the background for our perceptions, the baseline for our dispositions, and the basis for our (often unthought) action in the world.<sup>14</sup>

“Why should the devil get all the best stories?”<sup>15</sup> asks Smith. Indeed, he shouldn’t.

How are we called to “better” our Story? That is, how are we called to more intentionally adapt our liturgical practices to the end that they create space for the Holy Spirit to seep God’s Story into all parts of our being – from our minds, to our ears, to our eyes, to the depth of our bones – enabling us to enact God’s Story with our full bodies? For Smith, *this full embodiment is critical to making the hour of worship different*. “If we

---

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 163.

only learn to *think* ‘Christianly,’ we run the risk of . . . calmly and coolly seeing what’s in front of us without really *perceiving* what’s at stake.”<sup>16</sup>

### **It *Can* Be Different . . . Because of the Different Participants**

Just as our Enlightenment-shaped culture appreciates events for the knowledge they impart, our consumerist-shaped culture enjoys events for the entertainment they provide. When we attend a play or other production in our community, we expect that the cast has rehearsed the script, the sound and backstage crews know their cues, and the support staff makes sure we are comfortable. All we have to do is sit back, relax, and enjoy the show.

*The event of worship can be different from other events when the focus is not consumerist production, but communal participation. In worship we experience the difference that koinonia can make.*

Again, from Smith, “We aren’t just educating *spectators* or *observers*; we are educating *actors* (emphasis added).”<sup>17</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, worship is an art, and, according to Clayton Schmit, “Because worship is an art, and because all who are assembled need to participate in order for worship to reach its full vitality, we need to remember there are no observers in worship.”<sup>18</sup> Using this analogy, God is the chief

---

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 62. I will return to “what’s at stake” later in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 91-92.

artist and agent. In worship we participate with God and with one another as actors in a grand drama into which God has graciously welcomed us.

To explore more fully the distinction *koinonia* makes, this thesis-project intentionally focused on the opening and s/ending of worship. These liturgical acts mark “the beginning of the hour of adoration, [and]...also the conclusion of the period of action,”<sup>19</sup> and later the return to the hour of reStor(y)ed activity, in terms of *chronos* time, but more significantly, *kairos* time. They mark the hour on the clock, as well as the hour in the community. Through the Call to Worship, God invites us to unite our individual stories with our corporate Story in Christ. “When the people of God assemble, they do so as a local configuration of the body of Christ. This makes *gathering* a key feature of any form of worship.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the sending reminds us that, while we move back into our individual stories in the world, we do so with the assurance that we are sent as the “dispersed body”<sup>21</sup> of Christ who is with us always (Matthew 28:20).

While the thesis-project directly inquired about the impact of these two liturgical movements, the outcomes “chart[ed] the conversation between God and God’s people throughout the flow of worship.”<sup>22</sup> When reflecting on how God’s call to “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) is like rebooting a computer, one participant said,

---

<sup>19</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 161.

<sup>20</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2009), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Emily R. Brink and Paul Detterman, *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 53.

“Shouting ‘Praise God!’ [with the children] during children’s time was like pressing the reset button.” Later in the series, in response to the question, “What did you hear in the closing part of worship?” one participant wrote, “In the closing hymn ‘Here I Am, Lord,’ I heard [the person next to me] sing the wrong words. Instead of ‘Is it I, Lord?’ [the person] sang, ‘It is I, Lord.’ I loved it!”

For these individuals, such “conversations” were part of the gospel message that morning. Their reflections raise an important question, when in worship is God’s Story proclaimed?

Many liturgical theologians discuss the relationship between preaching and the overall liturgy when it comes to the telling of God’s Story. Al Tizon asserts, “The Word part of the liturgy is exactly that – only a part of the whole experience of corporate worship. . . . Therefore, the effectiveness of the missional sermon relies on a missionally framed service, each aspect working together to glorify God and to better understand God’s purpose in and for the world.”<sup>23</sup> However, later he suggests, “An excellently preached word articulates – makes clear – God’s intentions like no song, ritual, or prayer could.”<sup>24</sup>

As a pastor in the Reformed Tradition, I affirm the Word rightly preached. At the same time, my experience – and that of those surveyed – contends that other liturgical acts can equally articulate God’s intentions. “Because all of worship is a form of

---

<sup>23</sup> Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Tizon, *Missional Preaching*, 31.

proclamation, Scripture can appear in different forms.”<sup>25</sup> Take, for instance, our sacred songs. When asked, “What was most helpful in making clear that Christ has called you to do something in response to God’s Word and to assure you that you are not alone – that God goes with you?” comments formed a common theme:

- “The closing hymn and benediction were the most helpful in clarifying and giving direction for the coming week.”
- “The hymn ‘Here I Am, Lord’ was a wonderful ending to the service to help inspire us to continue God’s Story.”
- “Music is highly important in an inspirational service.”

Some of the most profound moments of ministry for me have been the times I have led worship at a memory care facility. While most of the patients can no longer articulate a sentence in a conversation, they still join in the conversation of faith by singing, from memory, the words of familiar hymns. What a great testimony to our storied formation. Long after the mind is no longer a fully functioning faculty, the heart remembers, for “the heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing.”<sup>26</sup>

If we affirm with Christopher Wright that “God’s ultimate purpose for the blessing of the nations is that they should come to know and glorify him as their greatest good,” that “Israel’s existence for that global purpose is bound up with the requirement that they themselves should be a people who embody that knowledge and

---

<sup>25</sup> Brink and Detterman, *Wise Church*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 38.

worship,” *and* that “this is most succinctly seen in Psalm 100,”<sup>27</sup> one of the original *hymns* of our faith, we then would acknowledge that *all* of worship can articulate God’s purposes. If we acknowledge this in principle, then how do we embody this knowledge in practice? It comes by the story we tell about the *koinonia* of worship participation - and the *koinonia* of worship planning.

During the series supporting this project, one of the participants asked why the anthem was not among the areas included on the reflection survey. I responded that the thesis-project was designed to test my research and thesis as a doctoral student and worship leader. Since I was not as directly responsible for the selection and leadership of the anthem, I chose to omit it from the survey. As I reflected further on my answer, however, I wondered, from a *liturgical* standpoint, what did that response say to this person (or to our choir or to our music director) about what I believe about worship planning?

Preachers are not the “experts” on God’s Story. Schmit reminds us, “If liturgy is the work of the people, then it is not something performed” – or planned – “solely by ordained priests for the sake of gathered worshipers. It is something done by the entire priesthood of believers (I Peter 2:9).”<sup>28</sup> As God’s Story is a *koinonia* Story, each participant brings a voice to the conversation, and we rehearse God’s Story by listening to other “actors” in the Story. For instance, in preparing for the first Lord’s Day of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 248.

<sup>28</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 30.

series, our Director of Music selected what is traditionally a Lenten hymn, “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed,” explaining, “If the theme of this Sunday’s liturgy is an overview of God’s Story, this is the heart of God’s Story.”

Liturgy is the work of the people - the work of *all* people. On the last week of the series, I charged us to list ways that “Jesus saw Satan fall” each day in the coming week. That idea was not my own. Earlier that week, an elder shared with me that he had been reading Luke 10 and asking himself, “When did Jesus see Satan fall in my life today?” I credited the elder in the sermon. Of all the charges referenced on the surveys during the series, this was the one most commonly and directly quoted.

This thesis-project raised a related question. One member wanted to participate in the thesis-project survey, yet she was going to be out of town many Sundays. “Can I just listen to the recording of the sermon?” she asked. The question reveals her own perception of worship, which is a direct result of the perception we send people when we publicize the act of worship. After the liturgical hour, many congregations include audio links to the sermon recordings on the website, social media, and e-newsletters. What does this promotion of “just the sermon” say about what we believe regarding the proclamation of God’s Story in worship? What does it say about how, when, or by whom the Story is proclaimed? Is it not more liturgically accurate and biblically faithful to publicize, as some congregations do, the order of worship and links to hymn recordings along with the sermon?<sup>29</sup> Such planning can be challenging work, but it is also vital – and

---

<sup>29</sup> This conversation about live streaming and other means of online accessibility raises a larger discussion: Do we encourage corporate worship? I recognize that such media is a vital ministry to deployed military members, those confined to their homes or hospital due to illness, and others. But the ease of



*joyful* - work. For liturgy to be truly the work of the people, it must demonstrate the integrity, that is, the oneness, of our Story. "Somehow the God we name, the music we sing, the prayers we offer, and the Scripture we hear read and preached has to call us deeper into God's heart and deeper into the world for which Christ died."<sup>30</sup>

By taking seriously our call to tell God's Story within our community and as a community, we make the hour of worship different from other hours by the way we bear witness to *koinonia* from worship's beginning to its s/end.

### **It *Can* Be Different . . . When It Is the Same**

We often spend our hours in search of something new. Tired of the usual restaurant, our spouse suggests we try some new place. Our boss needs a new campaign slogan or a new look to the website. We search channels of cable re-runs looking for a new episode with a fresh story. We can be convinced that we need the newest smartphone, a new car, a new image. Throughout these searching hours, our culture urges us, via external pressure or self-imposed, to pursue the latest and greatest and to resist the old and mundane. In worship that pursuit is suspended, for we find that for which we are truly searching: *The liturgical hour can be different when it is the same.*

---

accessibility can also tempt some to choose to worship as an individual in the privacy of their home, rather than as a congregation in the sanctuary. If we are going to provide this accessibility, we as worship leaders do well to consider how we also emphasize the biblical mandate of corporate worship (Chapter Two) to those who are able to gather as God's people.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 35.

Recall from Smith that, among the ways our liturgical style seeks to be relevant to the culture is in the way we tend to have a “built-in allergy to repetition in worship.”<sup>31</sup> This thesis-project tests that allergy of worshipers, including their leaders, by nature of its focus on the “basics” of liturgy. What I discovered is that I sometimes have more of an allergy to repetitive worship than does our congregation.

The first Sunday of the series offered an overview of God’s Story as told in worship. The outline of the sermon was the outline of the fourfold order of worship and God’s fourfold Story. Admittedly, it felt rather routine to me, and as a newly called interim pastor of this congregation, I wondered for whom in the congregation this concept was old and for whom it was new. The outcomes of the series revealed that it is both-and.

As worship leaders, we may take for granted that our worshipers know, first, *that* we have an order of worship and, second, *why* we have an order of worship. When we take the time to explain the order, we may discover it is new to even our most long-term, regular members, as most of the thesis-project participants were: “There are four parts of worship – I’d never thought of it that way before!” remarked one respondent. “I’d never understood worship until now!” exclaimed another. Even a brief introduction communicates why the order is important: “We have an order of worship because repetition improves our knowledge of God’s Word,” said a third respondent.

As stated earlier, when asked to summarize the theme that day, most often respondents cited an illustration of a biblical truth. Rarely did they cite a principle of a

---

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 181.

biblical truth. The exception is the core truths that were repeated. On the Sunday when the Word centered on Psalm 100, I mentioned early in the sermon the fact that the promise “God’s steadfast love endures forever” (v. 5) occurs over forty times in the Old Testament. Before continuing with the sermon, I simply repeated this promise – with no commentary – several times. That great biblical truth is what most people remembered from the worship experience that morning.

We may have an allergy to repetition, but we understand its value. Recall from Smith, “Ritual is the way we (learn to) believe with our bodies”<sup>32</sup>: “We are being taught *how* to perceive the world when we are taught to sit up straight; we are learning how to constitute our social world when we’re trained to line up in single file; and when we are enjoined to kneel for confession, an entire cosmology is instilled in us.”<sup>33</sup> In short, “there is no formation without repetition.”<sup>34</sup>

Tim Keller advises, “Explain the service as you go along. . . . By doing this, we will continually instruct newcomers in worship.”<sup>35</sup> Based on the outcomes of this thesis-project, I recommend we continually instruct *old*comers as well. While we may print the order in the bulletin, many do not think about it. But the more we take time to think

---

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 183.

<sup>35</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 304.

about it, the more we will eventually *not* think about it, for we will have become “natives,”<sup>36</sup> not just of the order, but more importantly, of God’s Story.<sup>37</sup>

Even in the repetition, there is a newness. The one consistent liturgical piece we used weekly was the Apostles’ Creed. As observed in Chapter Three, the temptation can be to repeat familiar words without reflection, causing them to lose their freshness. For one participant, the opposite is true: “The Apostles’ Creed has always reassured and reminded me of my life mission to spread love, joy, and God’s Word on a daily basis.” There is a timeless relevance to the “old, old, Story.”<sup>38</sup> “Nothing could be more relevant than the God who made us and came to live among us in Jesus Christ.”<sup>39</sup> As evidenced by this participant’s reflection, the repetition of God’s Story brings both comfort and renewal.

If we still fear that even the most lifelong “natives” will eventually develop an allergy, or worse yet, an inoculation to this repetition of God’s Story, then Keller might suggest we as worship leaders do not fully understand the both-and of the gospel:

Because the gospel is so rich, it can handle the burden of being the ‘one main thing’ of a church. . . .  
. . . We are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> See Footnote 9. In addition to an introductory session on worship as the telling of God’s Story, I recommend proactively seeking opportunities – during both the liturgical hour and other corporate gatherings – to continually teach these concepts in order to nurture this native habitation of God’s Story.

<sup>38</sup> From the hymn titled “Tell Me the Old, Old Story” written by Kate Hankey and published in 1883.

<sup>39</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 36, 48.

It is this timeless relevance and timeless power of the gospel that gives worship leaders both “deeper humility as well as deeper confidence”<sup>41</sup> in centering our liturgy on the same gospel Story each week, for the gospel is the “offense and consolation”<sup>42</sup> to believers and nonbelievers alike. Indeed, if it is *both* the offense *and* the consolation, then the fact that worship is the same does not mean it is safe . . .

### **It *Can* Be Different . . . Because It Is *Never* the Same**

Chief among authors who understood our love of story and how story illustrates God’s Story was C.S. Lewis. In a scene from Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, two children Susan and Lucy are talking with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about their upcoming meeting with Aslan, when suddenly the children learn that Aslan is a lion:

“Ooh!” said Susan. “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and make no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”<sup>43</sup>

“Nothing could be more relevant than the God who made us and came to live among us in Jesus Christ,”<sup>44</sup> says Labberton, and “Nothing is as dangerous as encountering the

---

<sup>41</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 65.

<sup>42</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 307.

<sup>43</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Book Two (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1994), 79-80.

<sup>44</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 50.

true and living God. Why? Because meeting God redefines everything we call normal and commands us to seek first his kingdom (Matthew 6:33).”<sup>45</sup>

As the Psalmist declares, God commands us to seek him in worship (Psalm 100, 122, 134). Likewise, the Psalmist assures us that God alone is worthy of our worship, “For the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever” (Psalm 100:5).

Yet as Labberton – and Mr. Beaver – note, even this “assurance” of God’s goodness is not safe. “When worship is our response to the One who alone is worthy of it – Jesus Christ – then our lives are on their way of being turned inside out.”<sup>46</sup> Our good and loving God is the author of our Story. God knows our Story – from its beginning to its end. He alone knows the great adventure it holds. *When we entrust our stories to his Story, we commit ourselves to God’s redefinition of our story – from beginning to end and top to bottom.*

How do we as worship leaders invite people into this encounter with the living God? It comes by the Story we tell through the questions we ask. Two of the questions asked in the thesis-project survey were:

- “In 2-3 sentences, summarize what you heard in the Scripture and sermon.”
- “In one sentence, summarize in your own words the focus or theme of Scripture.”

In the concluding evaluation, a few people commented that these two questions are the same. To me they are different, as one asks what the worshiper heard the Holy Spirit say

---

<sup>45</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 14.

(which may or may not be the same as what the preacher said!),<sup>47</sup> and the other evaluates how well the theme of worship was conveyed.

However, in reflecting on this feedback, I recognize that, while I as a worship leader make this distinction, I neglected to make the distinction for other worshipers. I asked what *they* heard; I did not ask what they heard the *Holy Spirit* say.

*The hour of worship can be different when we honor the difference God's speaking makes in worship.* How do we as worship leaders alert people to God's speaking? How do we alert people to the great mystery and promise that the gospel "is not something that we do, but something that has been done for us"<sup>48</sup>? Furthermore, how do we encourage worshipers to hear the *new* word God is speaking in the midst of God's old Story?

Agreeing with Labberton about the relevance of worship found in God's choosing to relate to us, Schmit concludes, "If worship is relevant in that sense, the implication is that *every* service of worship can be a *renewed* setting in which the Creator comes into communion with human creatures (emphasis added)."<sup>49</sup> As a result, the most seemingly ordinary parts of our liturgy can be extraordinary, even *surprising*, because of the power of the Holy Spirit:

The chief agent of surprise is the Holy Spirit at work in the creative minds of preachers, song writers, song leaders, musical groups, worship planners, visual

---

<sup>47</sup> I take seriously the Prayer for Illumination, praying that the words I speak would not be my words, but the Holy Spirit's, and that the words people hear would be what the Holy Spirit wants them to hear that day.

<sup>48</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 29. Smith concurs, "Worship isn't something we do; it does something to us." Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 173.

<sup>49</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 35.

and graphic artists, and children. The Spirit might even surprise a worshiper in ways that worship leaders did not plan. Extraordinary worship is inspired worship, adoration that takes full advantage of the spiritual gifts that are God's contribution to the life of prayer in each community. God does not demand that worship be a spectacle. But God does provide the body of Christ with the limbs and organs necessary for its life. Full use of these gifts is not a spectacular achievement; it is merely the exercise of a healthy body. Yet, the body is extraordinary.<sup>50</sup>

How do we as worship leaders alert people to the surprise of the Holy Spirit?

First, we may point out when God surprises worshipers in unplanned ways. For example, when the worshiper heard someone sing the “wrong words” to the hymn – which were actually the *right* words, for they were the message the person needed to hear that day? That cannot be humanly orchestrated; it is the work of the Spirit. Or the elder who heard in Scripture the question, “Where did Jesus see Satan fall in my life today?” That is the voice of the Spirit.

Second, we can give the body an opportunity to share the extraordinary ways the Spirit enabled them to exercise its gifts. Where do they see the Spirit working? The last question of the survey asked, “As a result of what you experienced in worship, what did you feel called to do throughout the coming week?” In order to help worshipers explore how the different hour of worship makes a difference in all our other hours, the next step is to ask, “During the past week, what *did* you do differently, think differently, feel differently, see differently, etc. as a result of God's Story told in worship?” – and then to *celebrate* that difference.

---

<sup>50</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 148.



Earlier in this chapter, we noted Smith's warning of "what's at stake" if we only learn to think differently, rather than to perceive differently, that is, to embody differently. "What's ultimately at stake in a liturgical anthropology is a philosophy of action"<sup>51</sup>:

In a society of mutual self-display and debilitating self-consciousness, it is a special grace to be invited into a Story where we are *hidden* with Christ in God. And being found in him, we are called out of ourselves to love neighbors and enemies, widows and orphans. In the performed story that is Christian worship, we are related to others as neighbors rather than as an "audience."<sup>52</sup>

Like Schmit, James K.A. Smith contends there is no audience in our relationship with God and one another in worship. Yet here he seems to expand the metaphor when he describes our being "called out" to love and relate to people as neighbors, rather than as an audience.

Recall Michael Frost's explanation of "movie trailers" as a great metaphor for the missional church, saying, "If it does its job, people will see what it does and say, 'I want to see the world they come from.'"<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, God's goal is actors, not auditors. God's purpose for the church is not that people will want to *see* as an "audience" the world we come from, but that they would want to *be* a part of the drama.

Just as we rehearse God's Story within the liturgical community and as a liturgical community, so we rehearse it *with* our larger community. In this manner, we extend God's covenant Story by welcoming our neighbors into the same *koinonia* as God

---

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 137.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 149-150.

<sup>53</sup> Frost, *Road to Missional*, 29.

in Christ welcomes us. As Labberton observes, “An important part of our imagination for justice comes from realizing that our life in God has placed us in a much wider communion.”<sup>54</sup>

Jesus calls us to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind” and to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37-38). By embodying this double command, we fulfill the rhythm of God’s Story told in worship.

Sending is not a hasty afterthought; it is the primary element of preparation for the demanding aspect of worship (action) that lasts from one Sunday morning to the next. During the week the faithful are engaged in outward worship, the work of God’s people, which might be called, “the living liturgy of discipleship.” . . . In short, worship consists of God’s people being sent and gathered, that is sent out for action in the world and gathered again for the hour of adoration.<sup>55</sup>

When we hear and respond to Jesus’ call to this “living liturgy of discipleship” in the liturgical hour, then the Sunday hour of worship marks a difference in our hours – and in the world’s hours - from Sunday to Sunday, and back again.

How do we alert people to Jesus’ sending us out to love our neighbors (Luke 10:1) and to his calling us to return in joy (Luke 10:17), that we might hear his rejoicing over us (Luke 10:20) and be sent out again, with his authority to go and make disciples and with his assurance that “I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20)?<sup>56</sup> That is the *ongoing* work of worship - and it comes by the Story we tell.

---

<sup>54</sup> Labberton, *Dangerous Act of Worship*, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Numbered ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 1375.

### **Conclusion: It *Is* Different . . . Because of the Savior**

The hour of worship *can* be different when it is not lecture or performance, but full-bodied enactment. It *will* be different when it invites us to remember God's Story and to join in the Spirit's imaginative renewal of the world through that Story. Indeed, it *is* different because of our Savior Jesus Christ, the One who invites us into the "unsafe" act of worship, the One who alone is worthy of our worship – for he's the King, Scripture tells us. N.T. Wright summarizes,

To enjoy worship for its own sake, or simply out of a cultural appreciation of the "performance" (whether of Byrd or heavy rock), would be like Moses coming upon a burning bush and deciding to cook his lunch on it. No: we too need to cultivate a memory that works forwards as well as backwards. . . . We are not escapists, when we come to worship the true God and to pray for his bruised and bleeding world. On the contrary. We come so that, in whatever ways God calls us, small or great, we can be his agents in rescuing the world that still lies in gaol and cries for freedom. We, after all, stand before a yet more glorious tree: the tree of Calvary, which speaks, more truly than any words, of the fire of love that still burns at the heart of the living God.<sup>57</sup>

May we continue to tell and re-tell God's Story, to the end that the entire world is set ablaze – to the praise of his glory.

---

<sup>57</sup> N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997), 74.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **WORSHIP SERIES OVERVIEW**

#### **Worth-Ship: All We're Worth for All God's Worth**

##### **Week One: It's Story Time!**

- Theme: Introduction to worship as telling God's story and our being restor(y)ed in order to restor(y) the world
- Scripture: Psalm 100, Ephesians 1:3-14

##### **Week Two: Ready, Set, Stop: Pausing the story to be ReStor(y)ed**

- Theme: Worship is the hour when activity ceases
- Scripture: Genesis 2:1-3, Matthew 11:25-30

##### **Week Three: There is No "I" in Church: How God's Story Is Our Story**

- Theme: Our call to community
- Scripture: Genesis 12:1-4, I Peter 2:4-12

##### **Week Four: Be Care-Full What You Pray For: Restor(y)ing Our Prayer**

- Theme: Our call to pray for our community (church, local community, nation, and world)
- Scripture: I Kings 8:33-43, Matthew 9:35-38

##### **Week Five: The Never-Ending Story: Restor(y)ing the World**

- Theme: Worship is the hour when activity begins again, as we are sent out to restor(y) the world
- Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

**APPENDIX B**  
**ORDERS OF WORSHIP<sup>1</sup>**

**SEPTEMBER 25, 2016 - 26<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Preparation for Worship

To your name, Lord Jesus,  
help me to bow the knee and all its worshipping,  
bow the head and all its thinking,  
bow the will and all its choosing,  
bow the heart and all its loving. To your name and in your name I pray, Amen.<sup>2</sup>

**GATHERING AROUND THE WORD**

Call to Worship (from Psalm 95)

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
**Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;**  
**let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!**  
O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
**For he is our God,**  
**and we are the people of his pasture,**  
**and the sheep of his hand.**

Hymn: "Come, Christians Join to Sing"

Invitation to Confession

---

<sup>1</sup> The orders listed here are not formatted the same as they were for the congregational bulletin. For the purpose of this thesis-project, the orders have been reformatted to give the reader a basic outline of the liturgy.

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Common Worship*. Prepared by the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 24.

## Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart and mind and strength.  
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
In your mercy, forgive what we have been,  
help us amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways  
to the glory of your holy name.<sup>3</sup>**

## Assurance of God's Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,  
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.  
For we are what he has made us,  
created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:8-10).

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## Grateful Response (singing together)

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be;  
world without end. Amen! Amen!**

## LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD

## Children's Time

## Tithes and Offerings

---

<sup>3</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 53.

Offertory Anthem: "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed"

Response

**Praise God from who all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below. Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Alleluia!**

Prayer of Dedication

Prayer for Illumination

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 100

New Testament Lesson: Ephesians 1:3-14

Sermon: "It's Story Time!"

Hymn: "All People That on Earth Do Dwell"

#### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
he descended into hell;  
the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
the holy catholic church;  
the communion of saints;  
the forgiveness of sins;**

**the resurrection of the body;  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Concerns of the Congregation

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,  
forever. Amen.**

#### **GOING OUT TO BE A PART OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD**

Hymn: "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations"

Charge and Benediction

Benediction Response

**For the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noon-day bright,  
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.**

Carrying the Light of Christ out into the World



OCTOBER 2, 2016 – 27<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Preparation for Worship

Lord, open unto me...  
Open unto me—light for my darkness.  
Open unto me—courage for my fear.  
Open unto me—hope for my despair.  
Open unto me—peace for my turmoil.  
Open unto me—joy for my sorrow.  
Open unto me—strength for my weakness.  
Open unto me—wisdom for my confusion.  
Open unto me—forgiveness for my sins.  
Open unto me—love for my hates.  
Open unto me—thy Self for myself.  
Lord, Lord, open unto me! Amen.

– Howard Thurman (1900-1981)<sup>4</sup>

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

Call to Worship (from Psalm 46)

God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
**Therefore, we will not fear,**  
**though the earth should change,**  
**though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,**  
**though its waters roar and foam,**  
**though the mountains tremble with its tumult.**  
“Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.”  
**The Lord of hosts is with us;**  
**the God of Jacob is our refuge.**

Hymn: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Invitation to Confession

---

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 23.

Prayer of Confession (based on Psalm 51)

**Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love.  
In your great tenderness wipe away my offenses;  
wash me thoroughly from my guilt;  
purify me from my sin.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>5</sup>**

Assurance of God's Grace

The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
As the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his love toward those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far he removes our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:8, 11-12).

Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.

**Thanks be to God.**

Response

**Alleluia, alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord.  
Alleluia, alleluia! Give praise to His Name.**

#### **LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD**

Children's Time

Tithes and Offerings

Offertory Anthem: "Be Still My Soul"

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 2.2.7.

Response

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Prayer of Dedication

Prayer for Illumination

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 2:1-3

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 11:25-30

Sermon: "Ready, Set, Stop: Pausing the story to be ReStor(y)ed"

Hymn: "Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!"

*(After the third stanza and third chorus, we invite you to sing the chorus a fourth and final time, this time singing, "This is our story!")*

#### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

Concerns of the Congregation

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

The Great Thanksgiving

Distribution

Communion Anthem: "Let Us Break Bread Together"

*(You are invited to join the choir in singing the hymn as you come to the Lord's Table.)*

Prayer After Communion

#### **GOING OUT TO BE A PART OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD**

Hymn: "God of Grace and God of Glory"

Charge and Benediction

Benediction Response

**In Christ there is no east or west, in Him no south or north;  
But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.**

**Join hands, disciples of the faith, what-e'er your race may be.  
All children of the living God are surely kin to me.**

Carrying the Light of Christ out into the World

OCTOBER 9, 2016 – 28<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Preparation for Worship

We have come to join in worship and adore the Lord our God.  
Let us come in prayer expecting God to speak His mighty Word.  
All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.  
Christians, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

Call to Worship (from Psalm 47)

Clap your hands, all you peoples;  
shout to God with loud songs of joy.  
**For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,  
a great king over all the earth.**  
Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.  
**For God is the king of all the earth;  
sing praises with a psalm.**

Hymn: “Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above”

Invitation to Confession

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.  
We have failed to be an obedient church.  
We have not done your will,  
we have broken your law,  
we have rebelled against your love.  
We have not loved our neighbors,  
and we have refused to hear the cry of the needy.  
Forgive us, we pray.  
Free us for joyful obedience,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>6</sup>**

---

<sup>6</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 89.

## Assurance of God's Grace

If we say that we have fellowship with him  
while we are walking in darkness,  
we lie and do not do what is true;  
but if we walk in the light  
as he himself is in the light,  
we have fellowship with one another,  
and the blood of Jesus his Son  
cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

Sisters and brothers,  
hear and believe the good news:  
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## Response

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be;  
world without end. Amen! Amen!**

## LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD

### Children's Time

### Tithes and Offerings

### Offertory: "Be Thou My Vision"

## Response

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

### Prayer of Dedication

### Prayer for Illumination

### Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 12:1-4

New Testament Lesson: I Peter 2:4-12

Sermon: "There Is No "I" in Church: How God's Story is Our Story"

Hymn: "How Firm a Foundation"

#### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

Concerns of the Congregation

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

#### **GOING OUT TO BE A PART OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD**

Hymn: "Come Sing, O Church, in Joy!"

Charge and Benediction

Benediction Response

**May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind blow at your back.  
May the sun shine warmly on your face.  
May the rain fall softly on your fields,  
And until we meet again, until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand. Amen.**

Carrying the Light of Christ out into the World

OCTOBER 16, 2016 – 29<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Preparation for Worship

Dear God, we come to worship you today.  
We come to sing, pray, and listen.  
You always hear us.  
Help us to hear you.  
This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.<sup>7</sup>

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

Call to Worship (from Psalm 96)

O sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth!  
**Sing to the Lord, bless his name;**  
**tell of his salvation from day to day.**  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples.  
**For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.**

Hymn: "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

Invitation to Confession

Prayer of Confession

**Gracious God,**  
**our sins are too heavy to carry,**  
**too real to hide,**  
**and too deep to undo.**  
**Forgive what our lips tremble to name,**  
**what our hearts can no longer bear,**  
**and what has become for us**  
**a consuming fire of judgment.**  
**Set us free from a past that we cannot change;**  
**open to us a future in which we can be changed;**  
**and grant us grace to grow**  
**more and more in your likeness and image;**

---

<sup>7</sup> *Worship Sourcebook*, 1.1.8.



**through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.<sup>8</sup>**

Assurance of God's Grace

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
may not perish but may have eternal life (John 3:16).

Sisters and brothers, hear and believe the good news:  
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Response

**Joy to the world! The Lord is come:  
let earth receive her King.  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven and nature sing,  
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

#### LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD

Children's Time

Tithes and Offerings

Offertory: "Sweet Hour of Prayer"

Response

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Prayer of Dedication

Prayer for Illumination

---

<sup>8</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 88.

Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 8:33-43

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 9:35-38

Sermon: "Be Care-full What You Pray For: Restor(y)ing Our Prayer"

Hymn: "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind"

#### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

Concerns of the Congregation

Anthem: "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

#### **GOING OUT TO BE A PART OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD**

Hymn: "Lord, You Give the Great Commission"

Charge and Benediction

Benediction Response

**Go, tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born!**

Carrying the Light of Christ out into the World

OCTOBER 30, 2016 – 31<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Preparation for Worship

Grant us, O God,  
a mind to meditate on you;  
eyes to behold you;  
ears to listen for your word;  
a heart to love you;  
and a life to proclaim you;  
through the power of the Spirit  
of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

— *Attributed to Benedict of Nursia*<sup>9</sup>

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

Call to Worship (from Psalm 105)

O give thanks to the Lord,  
call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.  
**Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.**  
Glory in his holy name!  
**Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.**

Hymn: “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty”

Prayer of Confession

**Almighty God,  
we confess how hard it is to be your people.  
You have called us to be the church,  
to continue the mission of Jesus Christ  
to our lonely and confused world.  
Yet we acknowledge  
we are more apathetic than active,  
isolated than involved,  
callous than compassionate,  
obstinate than obedient,  
legalistic than loving.**

---

<sup>9</sup> *Book of Common Worship*, 24.

**Gracious God,  
have mercy upon us and forgive our sins.  
Remove the obstacles  
preventing us from being your representatives to a broken world.  
Awaken our hearts to the promised gift of your Holy Spirit.  
This we pray in Jesus' name.<sup>10</sup>**

#### Assurance of God's Grace

So if anyone is in Christ,  
there is a new creation:  
everything old has passed away;  
see, everything has become new!  
All of this is from God,  
who reconciled us to himself through Christ,  
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.  
So we are ambassadors for Christ,  
since God is making his appeal through us (II Corinthians 5:17-20).

**Through Jesus Christ we are reconciled.  
For Jesus Christ we are reconcilers.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

#### Response

#### LISTENING FOR GOD'S WORD

#### Children's Time

#### Tithes and Offerings

#### Offertory Anthem: "The Summons"

#### Response

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

---

<sup>10</sup> *Worship Sourcebook*, 2.2.20.

Prayer of Dedication

Prayer for Illumination

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8

New Testament Lesson: Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Sermon: "The Never-Ending Story: Restor(y)ing The World"

Hymn: "Called As Partners in Christ's Service"

#### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostles' Creed

**S**

Concerns of the Congregation

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

#### **GOING OUT TO BE A PART OF GOD'S WORD IN THE WORLD**

Hymn: "Here I Am, Lord"

Charge and Benediction

**You go nowhere by accident.  
Wherever you go, God is sending you there.  
Wherever you are, God has put you there.  
He has a purpose in your being there.  
Christ, who dwells in you,  
has something he wants to do through you wherever you are.  
Believe this, and go in his grace and love and power. Amen!**

*— Richard Halverson*

Benediction Response

**Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.  
I will hold Your people in my heart.**

Carrying the Light of Christ out into the World

## APPENDIX C

### SERMON OUTLINES, HYMN INTRODUCTIONS, CHARGES, AND BENEDICTIONS

#### **“It’s Story Time!” September 25, 2016**

##### **Today we are starting a new series on the meaning of worship.**

- In a way, we just *sang* the meaning of worship: Many worship theologians tell us, that, if we want a biblical definition of worship, start with the doxology: “Glory be to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit...”<sup>1</sup>
- Let us pray: *So Father, that would be our prayer. Through your Son Jesus Christ you have welcomed us into your family and called us to worship you. As we open your Word together, we pray that your Spirit would open our hearts, minds, and spirits to what it means to worship you for all you’re worth with all we’re worth. We ask this in the strong name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*

##### **It’s appropriate that right after singing the doxology, that is, right after singing the meaning of worship, we turn to Psalm 100.**

- Psalm 100 is the source of many worship songs, as well as worship tunes. The traditional tune to which we sing the doxology is called the *Old Hundredth*, named after this psalm.
- Our Director of Music and I made the intentional choice to sing the doxology to an alternate tune, as the hymn we will sing in a few minutes is also set to the *Old Hundredth*. In this way, we are bracketing our listening for God’s Word today with the doxology – just as Psalm 100 brackets us.
- Last week we read Psalm 23 and noted how the first verse tells us who God is and who we are: the Lord is my shepherd, and thus we are his sheep. Psalm 100 tells us the same thing, only not at the beginning this time, but in the middle. The middle of the psalm tells us who is our Creator and who we are created to be, and it’s bracketed on either end by a call to worship<sup>2</sup> – which also tells us something about who we are created to be. Listen for God’s Word.

##### ***Read Psalm 100.***

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 248-249.

**In the New Testament, we turn to Paul's Letter to the Ephesian Church where we will read one sentence.**

- If you've looked ahead at the Scripture citation, you might be thinking, "Wait a minute. One sentence? The bulletin says twelve verses." Yep. Exactly.
- Those of us who are in school, if we ever want a lesson on how to write a run-on sentence, Paul's a good role model. In the original Greek language, these twelve verses form one long sentence. It's almost as if Paul got so caught up in the wonder of God's grace that he couldn't stop to catch his breath....Listen again for God's Word.

***Read Ephesians 1:3-14. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

**How many of us remember story time during our nursery, Preschool, or elementary school days?**

- The teacher would spread out a blanket, maybe add some cuddly stuffed animals, and invite you to gather around and find a seat on the blanket while he or she read a story. *(As I shared these words, I took a big quilt and spread it out in the center aisle.)*
- What was your favorite story? Do you remember? Maybe it was about an action-filled adventure or a princess and her Prince Charming. Was there a character in the story you aspired to be when you grew up – a hero or heroine, or perhaps even the villain?
- Story time was a special time because, even if just for a few minutes, you forgot about how you got picked last for kickball at recess that morning or you forgot that your mom or dad didn't cut the crust off your PB&J sandwich for lunch (again!)
- Story time took you to another world, where you could get lost in its fantasy.

**Worship is just like that story time – only this story isn't fantasy; it's as real as it gets.**

**When traveling to major cities today, the only gates we're likely to see are a TSA checkpoint or toll booth.**

- But for centuries, old world cities were surrounded by walls with gates through which people had to pass to enter the city.
- Depending on whether you were leaving *for* or returning *from* a trip, the gate either meant you were coming home, or it meant you were entering a new, foreign land to explore.
- For us, when we enter God's gates in worship, it means both: we're at once coming home and at the same time invited into an adventure as pilgrims from another land.

**Just like entering the doors of our childhood home, or perhaps the home you've always wished you had, entering the gates of the Lord reminds us who we are and where we came from.**<sup>3</sup>

- In worship, we hear God's Story and, in turn, *our* story – not just in the Scriptures and sermon, but throughout the entire hour of worship.
- Paul takes a 30,000-foot view of God's Story in that one sentence spanning those twelve verses, so we're going to take a 30,000-foot view of God's Story as told in our order of worship.
- We'll unpack these more over the next five weeks.
- For today, let's take a look at the overarching themes of God's Story and our worship.
- If we had to summarize God's Story, it would be four parts:
  - Creation – how God designed the world to be;
  - Fall – how we were separated from God;
  - Redemption – how God brought us back into right relationship with him through Jesus Christ; and
  - Restoration - how the world will be again one day.
- That fourfold story shapes our fourfold worship printed in our bulletin: Gathering Around the Word, Listening for God's Word, Responding to God's Word, and Going Out to be a Part of God's Word in the World.

**Again, we'll look at these in more detail over the next few weeks, and I hope you'll join us for the whole series.**

- But for now, from that 30,000-foot view, let's look at each in brief.
- First, a word about why we have an order of worship – why this weekly repetition and ritual.
- We sometimes have an allergic reaction<sup>4</sup> to repetition – we like novelty, what's the latest and greatest.<sup>5</sup>
- At the same time, we understand the value of repetition.
  - How do you learn to be a good basketball player? You shoot 100 free-throw shots a day. How do you learn to play an instrument? You practice scales over and over again. How did our choir learn that beautiful anthem? They rehearsed it.<sup>6</sup>
  - How do we learn God's Story? We *rehearse* it week after week in worship so that it becomes, not just part of our conscience, but part of our sub-

---

<sup>3</sup> "The Great Gates of Praise," Homiletics Online, accessed September 19, 2016, [https://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=93040856](https://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040856).

<sup>4</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 181.



conscience, to the end that week after week our story becomes more in tune with God's Story.<sup>7</sup>

**So we rehearse our Call to Worship.**

- Each of the next five weeks we'll be using a psalm as our Call to Worship.
- When our Director of Music and I met to discuss the Scriptures and music for the series, we had three or four hymnbooks laid out in front of us. The Psalms are the original hymnbook of God's people, and Psalm 100 sets the standard, telling us: Why do we worship? Because the Lord is God, and God our Creator made us and calls us the creature to worship. The creature doesn't call itself to worship; the Creator does.
- That may bear repeating: we don't call ourselves to worship; God does.

**And why is God and God alone deserving of our worship?**

- Because the Lord isn't just God; he's also *good*.<sup>8</sup> His steadfast loves endures forever.
- By the way, that last phrase occurs over forty times in the Old Testament.
- Try repeating that phrase forty times today to yourself – his steadfast love endures forever, his steadfast love endures forever, his steadfast love endures forever.
- When we finish saying that forty times, is not the only appropriate response that of worship?

**And then immediately after acknowledging who God is as our Creator, we acknowledge who we are as God's creation and admit the brokenness of humanity, beginning where we should begin, with ourselves, through our Prayer of Confession.**

- It's often been asked: Why is a *confession* included as part of our worship every week?
- Sure, it's good to get things off our chest and, as a friend of mine says, to say things out loud and realize the sky doesn't fall when we do.
- But admitting all our stuff can be such a downer, and worship is supposed to make us feel good, right? So why can't we just focus on God's goodness and love and not deal with the other stuff?

**It's because, if there's any part of our worship that proclaims God's goodness and love, it's our prayer of confession.**

---

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 320.

**A pastor friend once told me about a time when she was supposed to call the congregation to join in the prayer of confession in worship.**

- Forgetting where she was in the order of the service, she instead walked up to the pulpit and said the traditional words to announce the assurance of God's grace: "Hear the good news!" Then she looked down at her bulletin and said, "Oops."
- Realizing she was in the "wrong" part of the service, she paused for a second, but then continued with the assurance of God's grace and afterwards invited people to join in the prayer of confession.
- In sharing the story, she said she realized the assurance does, in fact, serve as a call to confession, for who of us can truly and freely come before God and offer our confession unless we understand that God is *good*, that "the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8)?
- Forty times Scripture tells us that God's steadfast love endures forever. Scripture also tells us it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

**Having been called to worship by God and having confessed our brokenness and God's goodness, we are then ready to hear about God's redemption through the Scriptures read and preached.**

- We read a passage from both the Old Testament and the New Testament to remind ourselves that it is all one big story that runs from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to new creation.<sup>9</sup>
- One big story of God's redemption as God seeks us out time and time again, wooing us, calling us, inviting us to come home no matter how many times we've wandered off, until Christ returns and makes that home complete.
- Then we rehearse the story again by standing up and reciting one of the creeds of our faith to remind us that this isn't just your story or mine; it's our family's story of redemption.

**But what about the restoration part of God's Story?**

- The part of the story that tells us God is at work even now making all things right again in the world? Where does that fit into our order of worship?
- Certainly, we hear about it in God's Word. In our prayers of the people, we pray for loved ones, for our community and nation, for the world, and for ourselves to be restored.
- But where we really proclaim the fourth part of God's Story is in the fourth part of our worship: "Going Out to be a Part of God's Word in the World."

---

<sup>9</sup> Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 16.

**Let's be honest: For many of us, when we hit that closing hymn, we think we're closing in on the end of worship.**

- It's the fourth quarter. We're in the home stretch. There's lunch, a football game, and the beloved Sunday afternoon nap just around the corner.
- I'll let you in on a secret: Many of us pastors sometimes act that way, too.
- We're wrapping up – time to say a quick, final word, put a pretty bow on the end of worship, and close the door.

**But over the past year or so, I've come to realize that the most important words of worship aren't the sermon, nor are they the first words of worship.**

- The most important words of worship are the last words.
- And if we miss those words, we might miss the whole point of worship – and we might miss our mission as well.

**John Piper, author and founder of Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minnesota, once said, "Mission exists because worship doesn't."<sup>10</sup>**

- I'll admit that statements that suggest ministries might be at odds with one another tend to give me pause.
- But there is a lot of truth in Piper's statement: if worship is about God's gathering up all things in him, about all peoples of all the earth joining our voices together in the great doxology, and about God's faithfulness being proclaimed to all generations, I don't have to tell any of us that we still have a long way to go.

**Or on a local level...Think about the way many congregations designate their various committees.**

- We have Worship Committees and Missions Committees.
- Are they two separate things? If so, which one is the primary purpose of the church? Is worship the purpose, or is missions the purpose? As the saying goes, which comes first: the chicken or the egg?

**Over the next few weeks, we'll be exploring the relationship between worship and mission.**

- But for now, consider Paul's words in Ephesians. When it comes to which comes first – worship or mission – Paul says it's not a matter of choosing.
- In fact, Paul does not give us a choice to make. Our text this morning is about the purpose of the church. Yet Paul never uses the word "worship," nor does he use the word "mission." Instead, he simply refers to how we are to live, repeating three times – there's that repetition thing again – three times Paul tells us that we are to live to the "praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). Inside the gates of God's temple, outside the gates of God's temple, wherever we live, Paul says.

---

<sup>10</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 35.

### **And what fuels this life of praise?**

- The fact that the Lord is God, and God is sovereign, declare both the Psalmist and Paul.
- We may not know what tomorrow holds, but God does. God knew our days before we breathed on our first day. God chose you and me as his beloved child before the foundation of the world, blessing us with every blessing and destining us “to the praise of his glorious grace” to be a part of God’s family.
- God even knew before the foundation of the world that you and I would be a part of God’s family gathering this very hour.
- God knows everything in our past, God knows what’s going on in our present moment, and God knows what our future holds. What’s more – God knows what the ultimate future holds on that day when the new creation dawns, when Christ comes again and God will indeed gather up all things and all peoples, all of us, together in him.
- And here’s an amazing thought to me: every Sunday we gather together to worship we can celebrate that we are one week closer to that great day.<sup>11</sup> Talk about reason to make a joyful noise!

### **Now I’m going to bring it back down a notch from that heavenly day to the reality of today.**

- I know it’s not every day or even every Sunday that we have that long view in mind.
- Some days we like Paul are breathless because we’re so in awe of God’s amazing grace; other days we are breathless because life is moving way too fast.
- Some weeks we may enter into worship making a joyful noise; other weeks we may come here crying out in distress or alarm – incidentally, the original Hebrew of that verse in the Psalm can be translated either of those two ways.<sup>12</sup>
- Some Sundays we may leave here thinking we really got to worship; other Sundays we may leave thinking we got nothing.

### **Author and theologian Henri Nouwen tells the story of his discipline of spending an hour in prayer every morning at dawn.**

- He said some days he felt like he was really communicating with God, that he heard God speak into his life about what he was called to do, that he felt God heard his joys and cries, and he walked away feeling like he had truly been in God’s presence. Other days he left thinking that hour was a waste of time.
- Yet as he kept on keeping on, he realized the real waste would be had he *not* chosen to spend that hour with God, for over time he realized there was more going on than he ever could have imagined.

---

<sup>11</sup> From Paul Detterman.

<sup>12</sup> “Great Gates of Praise,” Homiletics Online.

**Let me encourage us to keep coming back each week – and to trust that God may be working in ways of which we are completely unaware. As another great “theologian” Woody Allen once said, “80% of life is showing up.”**

**So let us commit to showing up and to commit to being storyed up - for, when we get inside God’s Story, or rather, when we let God’s Story get inside us, when God connects our story with God’s Great Story and shows us how it is really the world’s story, that’s when the gates get blown off their hinges – and the real adventure begins.**

### **Charge and Benediction**

We said the last words of worship are the most important. We just sang some of them (“We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations.”) Sisters and brothers, unlike those city gates of old, God’s gates are flung wide open so that the story spills out into the streets. And who gets the privilege of telling that story? We do. But we do not do it alone. The God who made us and destined us for this great work goes with us, promising us that he is good; his steadfast love endures forever – forty times over. So go out and tell the story by *living* the story, for it is indeed the best fairy tale come true! And as you go, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you from this day until the dawn of that noontide bright.

**“Ready, Set, Stop: Pausing the story to be ReStor(y)ed”**  
**October 2, 2016**

**Each of our Scripture passages this morning serves as a preface to a later passage about God’s command to honor the Sabbath.**

- In Genesis, we will read about how God rested on the seventh day of creation, which will later serve as the basis for why God calls us, as imitators of God, to rest on the seventh day.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus will invite us to rest. Then right afterwards, Jesus will be accused - twice – with good supporting evidence - twice – of working, instead of resting, on the Sabbath, which begs the question: What is the true meaning of rest? Listen for God’s Word.

***Read Genesis 2:1-3.***

**Before we read our New Testament text, let’s talk a bit more about its context.**

- We already said what comes *after* this passage, but we haven’t yet said what happens *before* it.
- Jesus’ great invitation here is often read by people when they want a word of comfort. But Jesus spoke these words in the midst of a heated controversy – and these words were meant, not so much to comfort, but to challenge.
- The whole conversation in Matthew Chapter 11 was in response to one question: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matthew 11:3) In other words, who are we looking for in the Messiah, the Savior?
- Jesus’ response centered around how people view his miracles. Some saw them as a cool magic show and kept asking Jesus to do more spectacular things to entertain and amaze them. Others saw them as just a flash in the pan, thinking Jesus was nothing more than a one-hit wonder – this, too, shall pass.
- But then there were those who realized these miracles were signs pointing to something even bigger and more spectacular: they pointed to the outbreak of God’s Kingdom. To this group, Jesus offered an invitation to show how his disciples might be signs of the Kingdom as well. Listen for God’s Word.

***Read Matthew 11:25-30. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

**So our administrator returned from maternity leave this week.**

- And there was much rejoicing among our faithful volunteers who have so generously given of their time to keep our office ministry going – THANK YOU.
- There seems also to be much rejoicing by our office computer and printer. On one of the many occasions when we were trying to get the computer and printer to cooperate with each other, Volunteer A, Volunteer B, and I joked that our office equipment was throwing a temper tantrum because it missed our administrator.
- One morning the computer just flat out refused to work. Volunteer C came to the office Monday morning, turned on the computer, and got the dreaded blue screen. She tried various keys on the keyboard, moved the mouse around, but nothing worked. Finally, she did what we all have to do with our computers every now and then – she pressed and held down the power button and gave it a hard reboot.

**Author Anne Lamott once said, “Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, even you.”**

**That’s what worship is for us.**

- As Sunday is our Sabbath day, worship is the hour when all activity ceases.<sup>13</sup> It’s the time when we have a chance to unplug and reboot.
- In the words of the Psalm we read in our Call To Worship, it’s the time when we are called to be still and know that God is God (Psalm 46:10).

**Now I don’t know about you, but especially on those weeks when life seems to be going 90 miles an hour, it’s hard to come to a screeching halt and just be still.**

- I used to go on an annual spiritual retreat at a Catholic retreat center in North Carolina. Other than set meal times, we were free to spend the day as we wished – no schedule, nothing we had to do. Every year I would begin the retreat by taking a long walk on the trail through the woods that surround the center. And every year, shortly after I started the walk, I’d stop and laugh at myself and ask, “Where’s the fire?” - because even on this supposedly leisurely walk, I was walking at a hurried pace as if I had somewhere I had to be.
- Maybe you’ve had the same experience on vacation or on a day off. How long does it typically take you to transition into vacation mode? To stop constantly glancing at your watch or smartphone? To let your *(sigh)* deep sighs turn into a much-needed *(inhale and exhale slowly)* deep breath?

---

<sup>13</sup> Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 161.

**That's why we take time to prepare to hear God's Word, to give us a chance to slow down and take that deep breath.**

- Maybe even to give us time to slow down enough to ask why we are here. Jesus' audience in our gospel text weren't the only ones who ever asked what they were looking for in Jesus. Whether consciously or subconsciously, that's the question we ask when we come to worship.
- Depending on what's been going on in our lives the past week, we may come looking for something that moves us or makes us feel good, something relevant or meaningful, something that restores us and tops off our tanks for all the activity that is about to start again.
- Or perhaps we come with a question: "What am I to do? What am I to do in this difficult relationship? What am I to do with this business decision? What am I to do with this medical news? What am I to do with the next chapter of my life? What am I to do tomorrow?"

**Author James K.A. Smith invites us to consider another question. He writes, "I can't answer the question, 'What am I to do' unless I have already answered a *prior* question, 'Of which story am I a part?'"<sup>14</sup>**

**That's why we gather for worship every week. To borrow Smith's words, after a full week of activity, we don't just need to be restored. We need to be "restor(y)ed."**

**To be reminded that from the beginning of creation, our story wasn't meant to be one of constant activity.**

- When God called us into being and called us into God's Story, God set apart the seventh day of the week to be holy because that is the day God rested from all the work of creation. Now that doesn't mean God took a break from being God. God is still actively at work creating and re-creating. If he weren't, if God were just here to top us off during the hour of worship and send us back out to go it alone with a, "Good luck to you out there,"<sup>15</sup> then this hour would be anything but restful.
- But when we understand that God is our Creator, that the one who keeps us neither slumbers nor sleeps, as the Psalmist tells us elsewhere (Psalm 121:4), then we can truly rest.

---

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 153.



**Rodger Nishioka, a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur,**

- tells the story of a time in his life when he was rushing around in a frenzy trying to tend to everything he had to get done. Even when he was sitting still, he wasn't *still* – he was *still* preoccupied with what he had to do next.
- One day a colleague came to him and said, "Rodger, I have good news for you: There is a Savior." Rodger said, "I know that. Why do you think I'm so busy trying to tell people about the Savior?"
- Rodger's friend said, "I have more good news: There is a Savior, and you are not he."

**Sometimes the best way to let God restore and restor(y) us is to remind ourselves: God is God, and I am not. When we know that God is God, then and only then can we truly be still.**

**And then and only then can we understand that the rest to which God calls us is not the rest of inactivity.**<sup>16</sup>

- In Jesus' invitation to those of us who are weak and weary, he tells us to take on a yoke. A yoke? A yoke is a work tool. Ask any oxen; they'll tell you, when they see a yoke, they don't say, "Oh good! That means it's time to rest."
- Yet Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you,...and you will find rest" (Matthew 11:29).

**The illustration of a yoke is not as familiar to some of us as it was to Jesus' audience.**

- Still, we get the concept. Literally, a yoke is a wooden frame that bonds together two animals tasked with carrying some burden or doing some labor.
- Figuratively, the term is used to describe the bond between two parties – the yoke of marriage or the merger of two companies or cultures.
- An easy yoke, or kind<sup>17</sup> yoke, as some translations say, is one that is designed to conform perfectly to the shape of the shoulders of the one who wears it so that it will be kind on the shoulders, without causing any chafing and therefore enabling one to carry the yoke more easily.

---

<sup>16</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 128.

<sup>17</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 129.

**Let me suggest that the reason we are weary and heavy-loaded is that many times, instead of taking on the yoke that was shaped to fit us, we try to conform ourselves to fit into other yokes.**

- We spend our week buying into a story that says we have to make a name for ourselves, to produce and maintain a certain image – through our jobs, school, families, sports, our bank accounts, our accomplishments, the recognition we receive, and more.
- When the yoke doesn't quite fit, there's a lot of painful chafing, and the load becomes heavy and difficult to carry. It may even slide off our misshapen shoulders.

**Jesus' yoke is different.**

- When Jesus calls it "my yoke," he doesn't mean it's the yoke he imposes on us. The yoke is his because Jesus wears it, too.<sup>18</sup>
- In other words, Jesus invites us to be his yoke-mate.
- And since his is an easy yoke designed to fit the shape of the shoulders of the one who wears it and if Jesus is the one wearing it with us, that means the yoke is shaped in the image of Jesus – and we are thus free to rest from the heavy labor of image production and set free to be about the work of image bearing.

**I didn't fully understand what that means – and am still learning – but a few years ago, on a mission trip to Nicaragua, my understanding grew a lot.**

- Our team was serving at a Young Life camp for Nicaraguan high school students. In addition to being a camp, the property had a working farm to help raise support for the ministry.
- One afternoon a group of us were walking around the farm with the camp director Jim Hornsby. Jim led us over to a pasture where there were some oxen, and he began to share with us about this same text from Matthew. Pointing to the field, he said, "Look at those two oxen yoked together. The purpose of the yoke is to join them so that they are walking together, working together, serving the same purpose. When one of the oxen gets off course, the yoke pulls against him. It's painful, but it serves the purpose of turning the ox back in line with the other ox so that they might work more easily together. So it is with Jesus' yoke and us."

---

<sup>18</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 129.

So it is with Jesus' yoke and us. Jesus invites us to take on his yoke, to be in a relationship with him, to walk with him, to learn from him so that the story of our lives no longer has to be about producing our own image, but bearing his image, for as such God created us.

**We said earlier that in our gospel text Jesus tells us how to be signs of the Kingdom.**

- Actually, both of our texts do.
- Theologian N.T. Wright once said, "Christians aren't defined by skin color, gender, by geographical location or even, shockingly, their good behavior. Nor are they defined by the religious feelings they have. They are defined by the god they worship."<sup>19</sup> – little "g" – for we have all kinds of gods we can choose to worship, and all kinds of gods that can define us.
- In the time when our Old Testament ancestors were living in exile, honoring the Sabbath was a way of making clear who was their God - *and* making clear, in the midst of all kinds of other religions, politics, and worldviews, who *wasn't* their god.<sup>20</sup>
- It's been said that, in a time when the church, who once held the center of society but has now been moved to the sidelines, we, too, are in exile, and thus we, too, we have the same joyful privilege of declaring by our Sabbath who is our God.
- Who do people say our God is based on how we live and work and rest? Do we appear to be our own gods, seeking to be self-sufficient, to be our own savior? Or are our lives defined by the God of all Creation, the One who never rests from watching over us and, therefore, we can rest?

**In the same way, our gospel text asks us: Whose yoke are we wearing?**

- Are we wearing a yoke where we are constantly trying to conform ourselves to make its image fit, no matter how painful it may be? Or do we wear Jesus' yoke, and not just *wear* it, but *share* it with him, so that people see us being transformed more and more into his life-giving image?
- Of which of those stories are we a part? Then and only then shall we know what we are to do next.

---

<sup>19</sup> N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 35.

**In closing, I want to read our text again, only this time from Eugene Peterson's translation.**

- I invite you to close your eyes and listen to Jesus' invitation.
- "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."<sup>21</sup> Thanks be to God.

**Hymn After the Sermon**

The hymn we have chosen to sing in response to God's Word is "Blessed Assurance." It reminds us of how God invites us into a story of resting in him. This is my story. This is your story. It is also our story together. So after we sing the third verse and third chorus, we will sing the chorus a fourth time, saying, "This is *our* story." Let us stand and sing together.

**Closing Hymn**

I invite you to turn to our closing hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory." It's a short one, maybe even a familiar one. As a result, we can easily sing through it without really considering what it is we're saying. Take the time to think about the words as we sing them. The text is both terrifying and reassuring. If we need to ask for God's wisdom and courage for the facing of this hour, what in the world are we about to face? Who knows? God knows. Let us sing and pray.

**Charge and Benediction**

Worship is the hour when activity ceases. It is also the hour when activity resumes.<sup>22</sup> It's time to face that hour. But we do not face it alone. We have a yoke-mate, and his name is Jesus. He will grant us wisdom and courage and everything we need to bear his yoke with him. So go out from this hour into the next hour, bearing his image for all the world to see. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you this day and forever more. Amen.

---

<sup>21</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, Numbered ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 1346.

<sup>22</sup> Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 161.

**“There Is No ‘I’ in Church: How God’s Story is Our Story”**  
**October 9, 2016**

**Introduction – The Church and Genesis**

- As we turn to God’s Word this morning, let me first ask us a question: Think about the last time you used the word “church.” What did your use of the word in that sentence say about the meaning of “church”?
- Maybe you said to a friend when she asked what you were doing today, “I’m going to church.” Or maybe when trying to get your family moving this morning, you told them, “Come on, it’s time to go to church.” What does the way we use the word “church” say about what we believe about the church?
- Today we’re talking about what it means to be the church, and its meaning is captured by the first imperative verb in each of our Scripture texts this morning. Listen for them.
- Our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Genesis. Last week we read part of the creation story in Genesis, that is, the first call of God, when God called the world into being and called the first individual humans into existence. Today we will read God’s second call. The call comes to an individual, but the call is not *about* an individual – God’s second call is a call to be an alternate community.<sup>23</sup> Listen for God’s Word.

***Read Genesis 12:1-4.***

**So we talked about verbs a second ago. Let’s talk a minute about pronouns. (You didn’t know we were going to get a grammar lesson this morning, did you?)**

- Ever notice the pronouns used in our hymns and liturgy? The choice of them is not accidental, for they tell a story.
- Our opening hymn might have a lot of first-person pronouns. For example, today we sang, “Thus all *my* gladsome way along *I* sing aloud thy praises. That all may hear the grateful song. *My* voice unwearied raises” (“Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above,” verse 4, emphasis added) – because we recognize that we come to worship as individuals with individual stories. But as worship progresses, we’ll sing more second-person pronouns – because part of the story we tell in worship is to remind us that we are not just individuals. *We is we.*

---

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 117-118.

**The way the Bible often describes our we-ness is with the pronoun “you.”**

- Now, if you’re like me, whenever I hear the word “you,” I often think of the singular form – because I’m from the South, and here in the South we know the proper plural form of you is? “Y’all.” If the Bible had just been written by Southerners, all this would be made clear, right?
- With few exceptions, every time we come across the word “you” in Scripture, it’s plural. God’s story in Scripture reminds us that we are not just individuals. *We* is *we*.

**...a point that Peter makes crystal clear.**

- Peter is writing to the exiles of the Dispersion, a group of people who have been scattered from areas where Christians represented the majority and who now find themselves in the minority and, therefore, often marginalized by society.
- We mentioned last week that many have said the church is in a time of exile, when the mainline church is declining in numbers and the largest religious group in our country is the “nones” – those who claim “none” as their religious status.
- How then shall the exiles of I Peter live? How then shall *we* live? Listen again for God’s Word.

***Read I Peter 2:4-12. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

**In the decade or so before I went to seminary, there was a shortage of pastors in our denomination.**

- As a result, a grant was created to encourage more people to consider the call to seminary and to ministry. My graduating class was one of the first that experienced an unexpected outcome of that grant: there were now more *pastors* than there were open pastoral *positions*, and thus it took many of us longer to find a call than it had for past graduates.
- As God’s call may sometimes wait, but student loans don’t, I took a temporary job working part-time at Eddie Bauer.
- I heard someone say once that each of us should work retail at some point in our lives. It certainly helped me have more compassion for sales people when I went shopping after work, and the benefits weren’t bad either. The fact that we got a 50% discount and probably 50% of James’ and my wardrobes is Eddie Bauer clothing is no coincidence.
- I’d say pastors and other church leaders especially should work in retail at some point – because, beyond the experience it gave me in the marketplace, it made me ask a question: When we go visiting churches to find one to call home, why do we call it “church shopping”?
- Think about the questions you ask when you’re shopping: Do I like this style? Does this color look good on me? Does this outfit flatter me? Do these clothes cover up my unflattering spots?
- It almost goes against – or rather, very directly goes against – who we are called to be as the church. Because all of those questions are all about me.

When fast-food restaurants insist we can “have it our way,” when selfies flood our Facebook news feeds, when the prefix of every Apple product – iPhone, iPad – suggest the temptation and even perhaps the desire to embody the world as “I,”<sup>24</sup> how do we cultivate the desire to embody the world as the “we” that God created us to be?

It comes by the story we tell.

**Paul makes this point crystal clear, not by the pronouns he uses, but by his metaphors.**

- All of them are communal, not singular. You can’t build a house with just a cornerstone and one stone – that’d be a pretty lousy house.
- Similarly, God doesn’t call us to be God’s *person*, but to be God’s *people*.
- In God’s design, there’s no such thing as a lone-ranger Christian - because following Jesus is too important to do it alone.<sup>25</sup>
- We glimpsed part of that last week when we said we were created in the image of God. The image of God is itself a relationship – the image of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. So, too, relationship is integral to what it means to bear the image of God, for it is only in relationship that you and I are able to work out what it means to bear God’s image.
- Consider the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience. You can say you are a loving person or a patient person. But how do you show the real evidence of that, the *fruit* of that? It’s only in relationship with another person. As the author of Proverbs tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

**Now iron’s sharpening iron can also cause friction, even the occasional spark.**

- We may get into disagreements. But why shouldn’t we?
- Whenever we encounter our first church disagreement and someone says, “But I thought church was supposed to be like a family,” I have to resist the temptation to ask, “Tell me, what are your family Thanksgiving dinners like?”
- Families may disagree because a true family dares to speak the truth in love.

**I mentioned our liturgy earlier.**

- The term “liturgy” is what we use to describe the words we say together – our call to worship, prayer of confession, affirmation of faith, and so on.
- The word “liturgy” literally means “the work of the people.”
- I love that term because it acknowledges that it takes work to hear God’s call to worship. It takes work to come to worship with our individual stories and leave with a deeper understanding that this is our story.

---

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> From the foundational documents of The Fellowship Community.

...and it takes work to realize that it's not just about coming with my story and leaving with our story, but to *come* with my story, to leave with our story, and then *go* to continue God's Story.

**We said earlier that the whole meaning of the church is captured by the first two verbs in our texts.**

- Did you catch what they were? "Come" and "go."
- Sometimes the way we say, "Come to church," it sounds like church is just a building. But as Peter tells us, church isn't a building; it's a people; it's us. Wherever we are, there the church is.

**But there's something else about that phrase.**

- We often tell people to "come to church" – kind of like the mantra from the movie *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come." That may have worked in earlier decades.
- But the fact is: Most people *don't* go church shopping anymore. They don't just come and show up at the church doors one day. In order to help people see who the church is, we have to discover our call to go – or rather, *re-discover* it, for that has always been our calling.

**When we look at Scripture, the only time Jesus ever used the verb "come" is when he's telling us to come to him:**

- "Come to him, a living stone," or "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens," as we read last week.
- When it comes to us and other people, he always used the verb, "Go." "Go and make disciples of all nations," or, in the words of our Old Testament text today, "Go from your country and your kindred to the land that I will show you."



**That's not a call to Abram as an individual, or even just a communal call to God's people in the Old Testament Israel.**

- If we the church inherited the titles of Old Testament Israel, as all of the metaphors Peter uses are – a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (I Peter 2:9) - then we also inherited the purpose of Israel's creation and redemption.<sup>26</sup>
- This is not just redemption for our sake. It is redemption for a purpose: "in order that," says Peter, you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9).
- The word "proclaim" implies a public declaration, like a herald in a town square – letting who we are spill out of our doors into the marketplace by the way we live and speak and act.
- Israel was never permitted to live in a vacuum.<sup>27</sup> Thank goodness they weren't – or you and I wouldn't be here today!
- Israel must always live for, with and among others.<sup>28</sup> That's also true of us.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "The church is the only organization that doesn't exist for itself."<sup>29</sup> We, too, must always live for, with, and among others.

**That's the gospel. Long before Jesus appeared in the flesh, Paul says in Galatians that God gave Abraham "the gospel in advance" (Galatians 3:8), God's plan for saving the world – that God would bless Abraham and make his name great, and through him bless all nations, and that in him all the families of the earth, including you and me, would be blessed.**

**As good as that good news is in Genesis 12, verses 1-3, it would all be for naught if it weren't for verse 4: "So Abram went."**

- No road map. No GPS. No address. It's perhaps one of the scariest passages I've read whenever I've been asking God what I am to do next: "Go from the known to the unknown."
- "So Abram went." He left all that he knew to step into what only God knew.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 250.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), 382.

<sup>30</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 121.

**Maybe you find yourself today standing on the edge of the unknown today.**

- It's perhaps what we are feeling as a church, as we are finishing up our Church Assessment Tool and wondering what God has in store for us next.
- Perhaps you're feeling a bit empty, like you're not sure what you have left to give in the next season. Resources are scarce. Money, time, and energy seem to be dwindling.
- If that's where we are today, then we're in a good place, for we're in the exact place Abram was. Chapter 11 of Genesis ends with a statement of the barrenness of Abram and his wife Sarai. Barrenness is a metaphor for hopelessness – when all prospects for the future have reached dead ends, when all of our plans have run their course, when we've tried everything we know to do, but the old way of doing things no longer seems to be working.
- It may sound like the most hope/less of scenarios, but it's actually the most hopeful. In the words of theologian Walter Brueggemann, "barrenness is the arena of God's life-giving action,"<sup>31</sup> as evidenced by Abram's story. In the midst of Abram's hopelessness, God called, and Abram responded because Abram realized, says Brueggemann, "to stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope."<sup>32</sup>

**God gave Abram two commands: "Go" and "Be a blessing," and the two are directly connected.**

- You can't be a blessing if you don't go. God's call in Genesis wouldn't be complete if it weren't for three little words, and those words set the trajectory for the rest of Genesis and for generations to come.
- "So Abram went" - because Abram knew it is only in going that you receive the blessing.

**The question is, do you and I know the same?**

---

<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 118.

### **Soren Kierkegaard tells the story of a community of ducks.**

- Every Sunday morning the ducks would waddle to the duck church to hear the duck preacher read from the duck Bible.
- This one particular Sunday morning the duck preacher walked up to the duck pulpit and turned in the duck Bible to Isaiah Chapter 40, and he read these words: "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).
- The duck preacher then turned to the duck congregation and said, "We are ducks!" "Amen!" said the ducks. The duck preacher continued: "We are ducks, but we have waddled too long. We have wings!" "Amen!" said the ducks. "We can spread our wings and fly!" said the duck preacher. "We can fly!" cheered the duck congregation. "We can fly!" "We can fly!"
- Then the service concluded, and all of the ducks waddled back home.

### **We are ducks, but we are called to fly.**

- Years ago God called us to be a new community, a community to be passed down from generation to generation. You and I are proof of that.
- Proof that Jesus called us to come to him so that he might build us into a spiritual house, made of stones of various gifts and skills and personalities all coming together as one strong and mighty house.
- Now we who once were not a people have been given the gospel privilege of going and inviting others to be God's people. We who once walked in darkness have been called by Christ to declare his mighty acts in order that all might experience his marvelous light.
- We, who once - that is, *always* - need mercy and, thanks be to God, have received mercy, have now been called to go and offer that same mercy to others.
- What will the next generation say about how we answered that call? Will they say that we spread our wings, or will they say we simply waddled our way back home?

### **Charge and Benediction**

So now it's time to leave the church – or rather, to leave the building and go and *be* the church. Our benediction response ("May the Road Rise to Meet You") is one we've sung many times. It's especially appropriate for today. Won't it be great when we meet again next Sunday and can share with one another the many opportunities Christ gave us to be his church this week? We normally turn and face one another as we sing. Today I invite us to turn and face the doors through which we will leave to go and be the church. Extend an arm in that direction as a means of commissioning one another to be a blessing this week until we meet again, knowing that God holds us in the palm of his hand.

**“Be Care-full What You Pray For: Restor(y)ing Our Prayer”**  
**October 16, 2016**

**This morning in the Old Testament we turn to the Book of I Kings to the time when Solomon was king of Israel.**

- Solomon was known as a great and wise leader, as evidenced by what he does in our text today.
- In the chapters preceding this one, we read of the construction of the temple. Now it's time to dedicate the temple to God. Solomon stands before the altar of the Lord to offer what would have sounded like the traditional prayers of the people for the congregation of Israel; it may even sound like the traditional prayers of the people for our congregation here – until we get to the last of Solomon's petitions. Listen for God's Word.

***Read I Kings 8:33-43.***

**Our New Testament passage marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry - and a turning point in the establishment of the Church as presented in the Gospels.**

- Up to this point in Matthew, Jesus had been the sole missionary.<sup>33</sup>
- In the scene we'll read today, when Jesus saw the overwhelming and ongoing needs of the people, it seemed Jesus decided he needed a little help. Listen again for God's Word.

***Read Matthew 9:35-38. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

**So we're talking about prayer today.**

- When it comes to prayer, I think congregations fall into one of two categories: Either we are a congregation that prays, or we are a praying congregation.
- Which are we?
- The difference between the two may sound like semantics, but actually the two are markedly different. A congregation that prays is a congregation that worships, that enjoys a good potluck, that prays *in* worship and at the *start* of every potluck, they pray at the beginning or end of every committee meeting – perhaps both.
- In other words, a congregation that prays is one that sees prayer as one of its many activities.
- A praying congregation, on the other hand, is one that doesn't define prayer as one of its activities; rather, prayer defines the congregation.

---

<sup>33</sup> Hare, *Matthew*, 109.

**Assuming the latter is desired, how do we become a congregation defined by prayer?**

- Our kneejerk reaction might be to say we just need to pray more.
- At the beginning of this series, we said how we learn and improve by repetition: a basketball player practices free throws; a pianist practices scales.
- Following that logic, one might assume that a congregation becomes a praying congregation by *doing* more *praying*.
- But if our goal is not to define prayer as an activity we *do*, but to have prayer define us, maybe the answer isn't found in our doing.

**Father Tom, a Catholic priest in Kenya, was once asked about the secret to the Christian life.**

- Father Tom answered, "In life, it's not about what you do; it's about what you see, out of which you do."
- I'd say the same is true of prayer. Prayer is not about what we do; it's about what we see, out of which we do.

**Not too long ago, we as Jesus' disciples used to ask a question – even wear a bracelet - that said: WWJD? What would Jesus do?**

- What if instead we were to ask: WWJS? What would Jesus *see*?
- Matthew tells us when Jesus *saw* the crowds, he had compassion on them.
- What do you and I see when we see others? What do we see when we look at our community, our nation, our world?
- Solomon described what he saw in broad strokes: famine, plague, war, sickness, and other crises.
- I shared with one of our members last week that, whenever there is some crisis in the world, my first response is to pray for those affected by the crisis. My second response is to pray against our human tendency to speculate why the crisis happened.
- When we see troubling things going on, we are often tempted to play armchair theologian, or worse yet, armchair god – offering reasons why the crisis happened and passing judgment on the brokenness we see.
- What did Jesus see when he looked at that same brokenness? Jesus saw a harvest, a bumper crop of opportunity.
- A harvest is a mixed metaphor, as it's full of both wheat and weeds.
- In this text, Jesus didn't distinguish between the two. Instead, he saw everyone equally as people in need of a shepherd. And if there was a need for a shepherd, the solution was to create more shepherds.
- Therefore, Jesus told the disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers.

**Now obviously I was being a bit facetious when I said earlier that it seemed Jesus needed help.**

- The God of the universe doesn't *need* help. Jesus the Good Shepherd is shepherd enough for all of us. But yet, by his mercy, Scripture says, Jesus chooses to include us in his ministry (II Corinthians 4:7).
- The God of the universe is also sovereign – God knows whom he is going to send.
- If Jesus already knew the answer, why did he tell the disciples to ask?

**Because Jesus knows that prayer helps us see things differently - to see more clearly those to *whom* we are being sent and to see *why* we are being sent.**

**This passage in Matthew has been called “the other Lord’s prayer.”<sup>34</sup>**

- It's the only other time in the gospels that Jesus explicitly tells the disciples what to pray.
- Hugh Palmer, Rector of All Souls Church in London, asks, “Why do we use the ‘Our Father’ prayer in our Christian liturgy so regularly, yet this other Lord’s prayer say rarely? What might have been the story of Christian mission if *this* prayer had become the one we memorized and repeated (and *meant*) down through the ages?”<sup>35</sup>

**Why don't we use this prayer more often? Perhaps because it's a dangerous prayer to pray<sup>36</sup> – because it begs the question: Will we be the answer to our own prayer?**

**A dangerous prayer to pray, a dangerous question to ask - and yet, oh, so necessary, if this scene is truly to be a turning point for Jesus' disciples then and now.**

**Solomon understood that. Long before Jesus even taught us this prayer, it became part of Solomon's prayer.**

- Long before Jesus commissioned his disciples, Solomon heard God's commission through his ancestor Abram, when God gave Abram the gospel in advance, as we read last week, calling him to be a blessing to the nations. That call to be a part of God's mission led Solomon to *missional* prayer.
- Even when going about the routine rituals and ceremony of dedicating the Temple, Solomon intentionally offered prayers of intercession for foreigners – because Solomon understood that the purpose of the Temple is not for those inside it, but for those outside it.

---

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 257-258.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 258.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 258.

**That might not sound that foreign to us.**

- We offer prayers of intercession for others every week in worship. But do we really?
- We tend to offer our intercessions for our friends and family. But do we like Solomon pray with the same fervency, the same consistency, the same prayer – that God would hear in heaven – the voices of the foreigner? Not just geographic foreigners, but spiritual ones, those who don't know God, those for whom it is foreign to call on God's name. Do we offer our prayers even for our *enemies*, those whose ways are foreign to all that we may believe to be true and right?

**Earlier this summer we read of a similar prayer offered by Abraham himself.**

- When Abraham learned of God's plan to destroy Sodom because of the evil things the people were doing, Abraham's first response was not to judge *against* them, but to pray *for* them (Genesis 18:22-33). To stand in the gap between good and evil and pray to God to hear their cry. That's what intercessory prayer is.<sup>37</sup>

**Father Tom's congregation in Kenya is a living example of that.**

- His congregation doesn't meet in a church building, at least not in the traditional sense. They meet in the corridor of an AIDS hospital just outside of Nairobi. As they are worshiping and praying, sometimes a nurse will come and wheel someone to surgery right down the center aisle, or even wheel the deceased to the morgue right down the center aisle.
- Praying in that hallway between rooms full of patients, that congregation is literally standing in the gap between sickness and health, between life and death.

**Our congregation here doesn't look like a hospital corridor.**

- But we have the same privilege: To stand in the gap between two things at odds with one another in the hopes of drawing them together, be it sickness and health, life and death, or any two peoples posed against one another – and to pray.
- To pray, not just so we can all get along and co-exist in peace on earth, not even because we know we're supposed to pray for our enemies or think it's the good Christian thing to do – but because *we can't help but do so*.

**Why did Solomon pray *for* the nations that they would pray *to* God and pray *to* God that God would hear in heaven and answer them so that they might know God's name?<sup>38</sup> Once Solomon came to know God's name, he couldn't help but want others to do the same.**

---

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 254.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 255.

**Solomon realized that he once was a foreigner far from God, just like you and I once were.**

- Maybe you even feel far from God today.
- If so, then hear this: That same compassion with which Jesus looked at the crowds, that's how Jesus looks upon us right now.
- We, too, were once like sheep without a shepherd, and God out of his compassion sent his Son to intercede for us and draw us to himself.
- And it's out of that same compassion that Jesus commissions us to be his co-missionaries, not because he has to, but because he *wants* to.

**Jesus interceded for us once on the cross and, Scripture tells us, he lives to intercede for us even right now in this moment (Romans 8:34),**

- praying that we would see the world the way he sees it, that we would see ourselves the way he sees us, and that we would see the great privilege we have of being invited to be co-intercessors with Christ.
- Once we see prayer this way, when we see prayer not just as *an* activity, but *the* activity, the way we participate in *God's* activity in the world, then there is a newness to our prayer, even our song.

**There's another prayer we encountered today, not in our Scripture readings, but in our Call to Worship.**

- Author Christopher Wright describes Psalm 96 as one of the most richly missional songs in the whole Bible.<sup>39</sup>
- We said a few weeks ago that the Psalms were the original hymnbook of our faith, the only hymnal God's people had for a while. They would sing through the Psalms over and over again until they had memorized them.
- Imagine after singing the same songs over and over again what they thought when they came across *this* psalm and *this* verse, "O sing to the Lord a new song" (Psalm 96:1).
- "This hymn isn't new," they might say. "We sang it last month!"
- "It may be an old song for us," the Psalmist replies undeterred, "but it is a new song to many who overhear us."<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 251.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 252.



Just as the conversion of the continent of Europe began in a prison, when Paul and Silas were singing the old, familiar hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25), and just as the same apostle Paul would later say of the church of Corinth that, if they would worship God for all God's worth with all they're worth, anyone who heard them would say, "God is really among you!" (I Corinthians 14:25),<sup>41</sup> so I believe all who overhear us might come to know God's name if we were to sing to God with a new song, with new energy, with the new and renewed prayers, the kind of song that God deserves – and so does the world.

...even – and especially – if that song is a Christmas carol.

**We asked in our e-newsletter and on Facebook: why Christmas carols in October?**

- Here's the answer: Christmas carols may be the oldest of songs to us. We probably didn't even have to print them in the bulletin – many of us memorized them long ago.
- They're not even new songs to some in our community. If Halloween decorations appeared in stores in August, you can bet that right after Halloween in two weeks, Christmas decorations will make their appearance, and with them the traditional Christmas music.
- Whether people are active in a church or not, when we hear them, most of us will catch ourselves humming along.

**We know the tune. But do we know the words? *Really* know them? Because ultimately, it's not about singing the song, but living it.**

**I came across an article not too long ago that claimed we are living in a pre-Christian era.**

- It's an odd statement, isn't it? By virtue of the fact that we *have* Christmas carols telling us that Jesus is born, that means Christ has come, right?
- He's established his church, and many of us here call ourselves Christians. So how can we say we still live in a pre-Christian era?

**Many people today don't really know Christ has come. They've heard the Word became flesh, but they've never *seen* the Word become flesh. But they could – if we were willing to make Jesus' prayer our prayer.**

**To pray *the* Lord's prayer – "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" – depends on also praying this *other* Lord's prayer – that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers to stand in the gap between heaven and earth and draw them closer together, one step at a time, one day at a time, one prayer at a time. A dangerous prayer to pray – because what if we're the answer? Dare we pray?**

---

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *Mission of God's People*, 253.

### **Prayer and Anthem**

St. Augustine once said, “He who sings prays twice.” As we enter into our time of intercessory prayer, let us begin by joining our prayers with the choir. Let us pray...*(The choir anthem, “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying,” was followed by the Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer.)*

### **Charge and Benediction**

What might have happened if this other Lord’s prayer became the one we memorized and repeated – and meant? Let’s find out. Each day this week prayerfully read through these verses in Matthew and see how God uses it to help you see people around you differently. As you pray to see as God sees, know how God sees you: God sees you with more compassion than you can ever imagine, so much so that when it comes to answering this prayer, God says, “I choose you.” May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day and ever more.

**“The Never-Ending Story: Restor(y)ing The World”**  
**October 30, 2016**

**Introduction**

- Today we are concluding our sermon series called “Worth-ship: All We’re Worth for All God’s Worth.”
- In the Old Testament, we turn to Isaiah Chapter 6. If you have section headings or footnotes in your Bible, you might see this passage titled the call or commissioning of Isaiah. It’s a familiar text to some, made famous by the last verse. It even became the basis of the hymn we’ll sing later in the service.
- But the verses leading up to it are just as important, for they tell us the context in which Isaiah heard his call. Listen for God’s Word.

***Read Isaiah 6:1-8.***

**In the New Testament, we pick up where we left off last week.**

- Jesus has seen the needs of the people in his community and has told the disciples to pray and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.
- Right after telling them to pray, Jesus told them to go – go and be the answer to their own prayer.
- Last week we looked at the first half of this scene according to Matthew. For the second half, this week we’re going to look at Luke’s account, for Luke doesn’t just tell us the remarkable things that will happen when the disciples are sent out; he also tells us the remarkable things that happen when they return. Listen again for God’s Word.

***Read Luke 10:1-12, 17-20. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

**A few years ago when I was serving a church in Snellville, we did a church-wide discipleship series called “my95.”**

- The basis of the study’s title is that even the most active church member spends no more than 5% of his or her time at church; the other 95% of the week is spent elsewhere. The study challenged us to consider: What are you doing with your 95?
- In our workshops, we each identified three places where we spent most of our time – our home and neighborhood, our workplace or school, and one place where we spent some of our free time – a ball field, book club, shopping mall, and so on – as well three people to whom we wanted to intentionally reach out.
- The premise of this exercise was that just by simply identifying specific places and people, it would help give us more direction in our efforts to share God’s love. Yet in reading the evaluations after the workshop, we realized there was a missing component. One member’s evaluation especially stood out to me. She wrote, “So I have my three places and my three people. Now what I am supposed to do?”

**It's a good question, perhaps one many of us have asked these past few weeks.**

- Over the course of this series, we've read various Scriptures that describe our call to join in God's mission:
  - "Live for the praise of his glory," says Paul in Ephesians.
  - "Take my yoke upon you," says Jesus.
  - "Proclaim God's mighty acts," says Peter.
  - "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples," says the Psalmist.
- Beautiful, flowery, poetic images. A lot of good, biblically solid stuff.
- But what exactly are we supposed to do when we walk out the door? What does all that mean for our everyday lives?

**It means you and I are called to be movie trailers.**

**What does a movie trailer do?**

- It gives you a glimpse of the upcoming feature. It whets your appetite for the real thing.
- It shows you some of the funniest scenes, the most romantic moments, or the best special effects, depending on the movie.
- It gives you just a bit of intrigue so you get a taste of the plot and want to know what happens next.
- And if a movie trailer has done its job, usually people in the theater will turn to someone else and say, "I want to see that movie."<sup>42</sup>

**That's what our lives are supposed to be:**

- That we give people here today a taste of the greatest joy, the greatest laughter, the greatest hope that we experience in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Our lives should be enough of a plot teaser that, if we do our job well, people will say, "I want to see the world they come from."

**In a very real sense, that's what Jesus sent the disciples out to be.**

- He sent them out to the places he intended to go, as previews of the coming attraction.
- His instructions were pretty basic. In answer to our question, "What are we supposed to do?" Jesus didn't give them a lot of things to do – he talked more about what to bring, or rather *not* to bring. We talked about some of these instructions earlier this summer when we were preaching through the lectionary. Today I want to focus on one specific instruction: Leave our baggage behind (Luke 10:4).

---

<sup>42</sup> Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 29.

**When Jesus said, “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals,” I don’t think he meant not to worry about whether our shoes or belts or handbags match our outfit. There’s bigger baggage we need to leave behind.**

**Not that long ago, in the time of the Crusades and even more recently, there was this idea that we have something to offer other people, and nothing to receive.**

- In today’s terms, how often do congregations only consider reaching out to our neighbors when attendance is down or finances come up short?
- And so we go out into our communities with an agenda trying to make, not necessarily disciples, but church members – and there can be a big difference between the two, especially in our approach.

**Jesus turned that whole concept upside down. He said, “Go into your communities, not as people with an agenda, but as people who simply want to share God’s love.”**

**Why take nothing with you? It’s only then that we are truly dependent and have to rely on one another. Maybe even only then that we take time to listen and be vulnerable with one another.**

**It’s been said that ministry moves at the speed of relationship.**

- That’s exactly what we find in Jesus’ instructions.
- Nothing he says – “Remain...Do not move” (Luke 10:7) – none of that moves at the speed at which we might like things to happen.
- In order to share Jesus’ love with his people, we have to become sociologists<sup>43</sup> – that is, students of people - students who are in it for the long haul, who take the time to get to know people, who listen to one another’s stories, who let people tell us their needs rather than assuming we know, students who are open to receiving the insights and gifts others have to offer us.
- And....who are open to offering Jesus’ love and grace no matter what the outcome.
- Do we catch that - do we *really* catch that - in Jesus’ instructions? The basic message is not contingent on how people respond.<sup>44</sup> Whether someone is a friend or enemy, whether they respond to God’s love or blow us off for the hundredth time, our message to those who accept us and to those who reject us is the same: “The kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:9, 11).

**And the basic posture of those of us who would carry this message is the same: we are to go as strangers seeking to get to know our home away from home.**

---

<sup>43</sup> Mike Breen at The Fellowship Community’s 2015 National Gathering, San Diego, CA.

<sup>44</sup> Fred Craddock, *Luke, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 145.

Missiologist Alan Roxburgh says, “Leave your baggage at home is a profoundly world-changing instruction. More than anything else, this is a gospel plea for the humanization of our relationships with others, rather than seeing the people of our neighborhoods as potential interests of our individual or church strategy. We must leave our baggage behind and be willing to become a stranger in need of the welcome and care of the other if we stand any chance of answering: What is God up to in the world today?”<sup>45</sup>

“What is God up to in the world today?” What if instead of assuming we know the answer, we might actually ask the question? The only way to ask the question is to be open to hearing the answer – and the question and the answer are the reason why we worship.

**The first week of our series I shared a statement by John Piper: “Mission exists because worship doesn’t.”<sup>46</sup>**

- We said that, while we don’t like putting two things at odd with each other, there is a lot of truth to Piper’s statement. If worship is about God’s gathering up all peoples to join together in one voice in the great doxology of faith, clearly we still have a mission.
- But what if the two things aren’t at odds with one another? What if instead they are in direct relation to each other? What if worship is both the fuel and goal of mission?<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 217.

<sup>46</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 35.

**Mark Labberton is the President of Fuller Theological Seminary and author of *The Dangerous Act of Worship* – that title alone tells us something about worship.**

- Labberton says, “Biblical worship that finds God will also find our neighbor.”<sup>48</sup>
- Jesus himself said the same thing, didn’t he? When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus stated two commandments, which were really one and the same, he said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. *And a second is like it,*” he says, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-38, emphasis added).
- If worship involves showing our love for God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and if the second is like it, then worship also means showing our love for our neighbor.

**That’s exactly what Isaiah discovered.**

- Over the years I’ve heard a lot of people ask, “How do I hear God’s call?” Well, look at how Isaiah heard God’s call. It’s in worship.
- This scene may sound like some supernatural vision, but it’s really just a traditional worship service,<sup>49</sup> not unlike those we have each week.
  - Isaiah is in the temple and sees God’s glory. “Holy, holy, holy,” sings the congregation (Isaiah 6:3).
  - In light of such holiness, Isaiah can’t help but recognize his *un*-holiness and offer a prayer of confession: “Woe is me!” (Isaiah 6:5).
  - After recognizing his human inadequacy, he hears the assurance of God’s grace: “Your guilt has departed,” God says (Isaiah 6:7).
  - And when he hears – or rather, *overhears*<sup>50</sup> – God’s question to the angels, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah can’t help but interrupt and say, “Me! Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

---

<sup>48</sup> Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God’s Call to Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 54.

<sup>50</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 54.

### **Three weeks ago I shared a story about a community of ducks**

- and how every Sunday morning the ducks waddle to the duck church to hear the duck preacher read from the duck Bible.
- One particular Sunday the duck preacher read these words from Isaiah: “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).
- The duck preacher then turned to the duck congregation and said, “We are ducks! We are ducks, but we have waddled too long. We have wings!” “Amen!” said the ducks. “We can spread our wings and fly!” said the duck preacher. “We can fly!” cheered the duck congregation.
- Then the service concluded, and all of the ducks waddled back home.

**That could have been Isaiah’s response. I imagine that, rather than spreading his wings to fly, he might have been tempted to hide behind those wings of the seraphim.**

### **All of us are tempted to waddle away from worship just as we waddled in – unchallenged and unchanged.**

- Perhaps it’s because we are creatures of habit. Perhaps it’s because we don’t like change.
- What’s the old joke? How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? “Change? What do you mean change?”
- My experience is, the more change is going on outside, the more we try to resist change on the inside. A change in leadership, be it a pastoral transition or national leadership, a change in health or finances, a change in our own personal situation, our family, and more.
- So when we gather here, we may be inclined to resist God’s call to change because this of all places should be a stable safe hold for us lambs living in a world of potential wolves.

### **Isaiah’s world was no different.**

- That opening phrase, “In the year that King Uzziah died...” (Isaiah 6:1) might not mean much to us, but it would have left Isaiah and all of his fellow worshipers shaking in their boots.
- Their nation was undergoing a change from a popular and effective leader to his unproven and less popular son. Concern for their peace and prosperity created a climate of anxiety like they’d never known before.
- Even so, Isaiah stepped up to the plate and allowed God to call the next play – for when human inadequacy encounters divine grace, what other response can there be?



**We've been talking about worship as encountering God's story: When God reveals God's story to us of how Christ restor(y)ies us and how he gives us the joy of restor(y)ing the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, and when we respond, "Here I am," then guess what? God's Kingdom just came a little closer.**

**Was there a risk? Sure.**

- If we keep on reading in the chapter, we hear the message Isaiah was called to offer. It was no walk in the park.
- Yet Isaiah accepted the call – because he had seen how God met his own need, he had seen the needs of his people,...and he had seen the King – not the King of Judah, but the *King* of Kings.
- No matter what changes are going on around us, there is one constant: Christ still sits on the throne, and if God is for us, whom shall we fear?

**Jim Martin is Vice President of International Justice Mission,**

- an agency that specializes in rescuing children from the violence of child sex trafficking and therefore knows firsthand what it means to take risks for the sake of the gospel.
- Martin says, "Faith grows most profoundly when it regularly encounters the failure point. If we are risk averse, we will be faith poor."<sup>51</sup>

**Is there a risk for us to say, "Here I am; send me?" Sure. The risk is: What if God actually does send *me*?**

- It is indeed a dangerous act to worship, isn't it?
- But as any risk assessment officer would tell us, you take a risk when the potential gain is greater. And friends, the potential gain couldn't be any greater than it is right now.

**When the disciples returned, they reported what they saw, and Jesus, in turn, reported what he saw.**

- The disciples said they saw demons submit to them, and Jesus replied he saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning. Go back and look over what Jesus told the seventy to do. He didn't mention anything about demons or Satan or anything about a spiritual battle.
- He just told them to go about living their lives, being with and among people, giving and receiving hospitality, and offering peace to one another.
- Yet somehow in all this natural everyday stuff, something supernatural was happening.

---

<sup>51</sup> Jim Martin, *The Just Church: Becoming a Risk-Taking, Justice-Seeking, Disciple-Making Congregation* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2012), 50.

**We often think that, in order to be a part of God's mission, we have to travel around the world or start some big, new project in our community. But sometimes the smallest acts have the greatest effects.**

- Every time we step up to the plate and allow God to use us, we are living proof that good does triumph over evil, that there is a King – a *good* King – and that God's Kingdom is getting closer and closer.
- Every time we bring forward to the communion table food for our food pantry as we'll do next week, Jesus sees Satan fall.
- Every time we serve lunch to our local school staff as Member A and Member B did a couple of weeks ago or help the children experience God's joy at a fall festival as Member C and Member D did on Friday, Jesus sees Satan fall.
- Every time our choir sings to the praise of God's glory, Jesus sees Satan fall.
- Every time we express our gratitude for the reconciliation Jesus offers us by taking even one baby step toward reconciliation with a co-worker, a fellow student, or a family member, Jesus sees Satan fall.
- Every time we offer someone something as simple as a cup of water in Jesus' name, Scripture says (Matthew 10:42), Jesus sees Satan fall.
- Every time we pray, with an openness to being the answer to our own prayer, do you know what Jesus sees?

**Let me challenge us to try an exercise this week.**

- I'd actually never thought about this idea until I was talking with Member E a couple of weeks ago. Member E said he's started spending time each day reflecting on how God is using him by asking: "Jesus saw Satan fall when I (fill in the blank)." I love that idea, and I'm challenging myself and each of us this week to do the same.
- At the end of the day, before you go to bed, ask yourself: When did Jesus see Satan fall today? Then list the answers God brings to mind. Don't just focus on big things – look especially for little things.
- It doesn't have to be anything seemingly earth-shattering – for *every* time we risk being the change God longs to see in the world, it's *more* than earth-shattering. *It's Kingdom-inbreaking.*

**Now there may be days when we can list all kinds of ways Jesus saw Satan fall. Other days we may think, "I got nothing." Not every movie trailer is a blockbuster hit.**

**It's easy to rejoice when we see results, and it's just as easy to get discouraged when we don't.**

- On those days when we have a hard time listing ways we've seen God at work, know that there is another list already written for us.
- The disciples returned with all kinds of exciting results to report, and Jesus joined in their joy. *Nevertheless*, Jesus reminded them of the true source of their joy: "Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).
- We rejoice in great things; Jesus rejoices in the greater thing.

**Sisters and brothers, Jesus is on the move, and he's sent us ahead as a preview of the great things to come. We've been given the authority. We've been given the script. We've been given the assurance that Jesus rejoices over us, not because of anything we do, but because of what he has already done. Now the cameras are rolling. Let's give the world a show like it's never seen before. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

**Charge and Benediction**

And so the adventure begins. We are released not *from* worship, but *to* worship. We are released, not as individuals, but *unleashed* into the world as Jesus' body, with the assurance that God goes with us. Jesus, the One who became the Word made flesh for us, now sends us out to continue being God's Story in the flesh. So as Christ's body, let us commission each other, using the words of Presbyterian pastor and former chaplain to the U.S. Senate Richard Halverson. Together....

**You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you there.  
Wherever you are, God has put you there. He has a purpose in your being there.  
Christ, who dwells in you, has something he wants to do through you wherever you are.  
Believe this, and go in his grace and love and power. Amen!**

## APPENDIX D

### WORSHIP REFLECTION AND WORSHIP REFLECTION CONCLUSION SURVEYS

#### Worship Reflection

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Worship: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Gathering Around the Word

1. What was your mindset when coming to church this morning? Why did you come to church? Circle the one that most closely describes how you were feeling, or fill in the blank beside "Other."
  - a. I came to see and spend time with friends or family.
  - b. I came because this is what I do on Sunday mornings.
  - c. I was feeling distracted or overwhelmed by a hectic schedule or some worry or concern.
  - d. I came feeling excited and ready to worship God.
  - e. For whatever reason, I honestly didn't really feel like worshipping today, but I decided to come anyway.
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did you hear in the opening part of worship (Preparing for Worship, Call to Worship, Opening Hymn)?
3. On a scale of 1-10, how well did the opening part of worship (Preparing for Worship, Call to Worship, and Opening Hymn) prepare you to worship God?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----
4. What was most helpful in encouraging you to pause from the week's activity and enter into the hour of worship? Please be as specific as possible.

### **Listening for God's Word**

5. In 2-3 sentences, summarize what you heard in the Scripture and sermon.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In one sentence, summarize in your own words the focus or theme of the Scripture and sermon.

### **Going Out to be a Part of God's Word in the World**

7. What did you hear in the closing part of worship (Closing Hymn, Charge and Benediction, Benediction Response)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. On a scale of 1-10, how well did the closing part of worship (Closing Hymn, Charge and Benediction, Benediction Response) give you a charge to carry God's Word into the world and assurance of God's promises as you go?  
  

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----
  
9. What was most helpful in making clear that Christ has called you to do something in response to God's Word and to assure you that you are not alone – that God goes with you as you join in God's mission throughout the coming week? Please be as specific as possible.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. As a result of what you experienced in worship, what did you feel called to do throughout the coming week?

**Thank you for taking the time to share your reflections.**

## **Worship Reflection Conclusion**

**Participant # \_\_\_\_\_**

**What did you learn about worship in the course of this series?**

**Did your understanding of worship change in the course of this series? If so, how?**

**How would you describe the relationship between worship and mission as a result of this series?**

**What was your biggest takeaway from this series?**

**Thank you for taking the time to share your reflections.**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Leslie C. *Psalms 101-150*. Word. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002.
- Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. New York, NY: Eternal Sun Books, 2016.
- Benson, Bruce Ellis. *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013.
- Block, Daniel I. *Deuteronomy*. NIV Application. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997.
- Book of Common Worship*. Prepared by the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.
- Book of Order 2015-2017*. Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2015.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Bradley, C. Randall. *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church's Music*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Brink, Emily R., and Paul Detterman. *Wise Church: Exploring Faith and Worship with Christians Around the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982.
- Bruner, Frederick Dale. *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Calvin, John. *The Sermons of John Calvin Upon the Fifth Book of Moses Called Deuteronomy*. London, England: Henry Middleton, 1583. Quoted in Patrick Miller, *Deuteronomy*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Chan, Simon. *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

- Corrie, John, ed. *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*. Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Craddock, Fred. *Luke*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998.
- Detterman, Paul. "Detterman's Top Ten List." *Reformed Worship* 69 (September 2003): 1-4.
- Foer, Jonathan Safran, ed. *New American Haggadah*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2012.
- Fowl, Stephen E. *Philippians*. Two Horizons New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Frost, Michael. *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011.
- Glasser, Arthur F. *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003.
- "The Great Gates of Praise." Homiletics Online. Accessed September 19, 2016. [https://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=93040856](https://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/btl_display.asp?installment_id=93040856).
- Green, Joel B. *I Peter*. Two Horizons New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Guder, Darrell L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Hare, Douglas R. A. *Matthew*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993.
- Hirsch, Alan, and Tim Catchim. *Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.
- Horton, Michael. *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002.
- Huck, Gabe, ed. *The Psalter*. Washington, D.C.: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, 1994.



- Immink, F. Gerrick. *The Touch of the Sacred: The Practice, Theology, and Tradition of Christian Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Johnson, Mark. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Keller, Timothy. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Labberton, Mark. *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The Chronicles of Narnia. Book Two. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1994.
- . *The Screwtape Letters*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996.
- Martin, Jim. *The Just Church: Becoming a Risk-Taking, Justice-Seeking, Disciple-Making Congregation*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012.
- Mays, James L. *Psalms*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994.
- Miller, Patrick D. *Deuteronomy*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Moody, Josh, and Robin Weekes. *Burning Hearts: Preaching to the Affections*. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2014.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Parry, Robin A. *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Numbered ed. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005.
- Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010.
- Rienstra, Debra, and Ron Rienstra. *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009.
- Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011.

- Schmit, Clayton J. *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009.
- . *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Seitz, Christopher R. *Isaiah 1-39*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993.
- Smith, James K.A. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013.
- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins, 1997.
- “Statistical Snapshot for Presbyterian Church of the Resurrection.” Presbyterian Mission Agency. Accessed February 28, 2017.  
<http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/22145/>.
- Tizon, Al. *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012.
- Torrance, James B. *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- United States Census Bureau, Rockdale County, Georgia, accessed March 8, 2017,  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/RHI305210/13247>.
- Webber, Robert E. *Worship Old and New*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.
- Witvliet, John D. *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003.
- The Worship Sourcebook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013.
- Wright, Christopher J.H. *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Wright, N.T. *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997.

- . *Matthew for Everyone. Part 1: Chapters 1-15*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004.
- . *Matthew for Everyone. Part 2: Chapters 16-28*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2004.
- . *Paul for Everyone. The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

## **VITA**

Nicole Elizabeth Howard Lock

Date and Place of Birth: 1973, Atlanta, Georgia

Education and Degrees:

2007: Master of Divinity, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey

1996: Bachelor of Arts in French, Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina

Years of Doctor of Ministry Work: 2014-Present

Anticipated Graduation: May 2017